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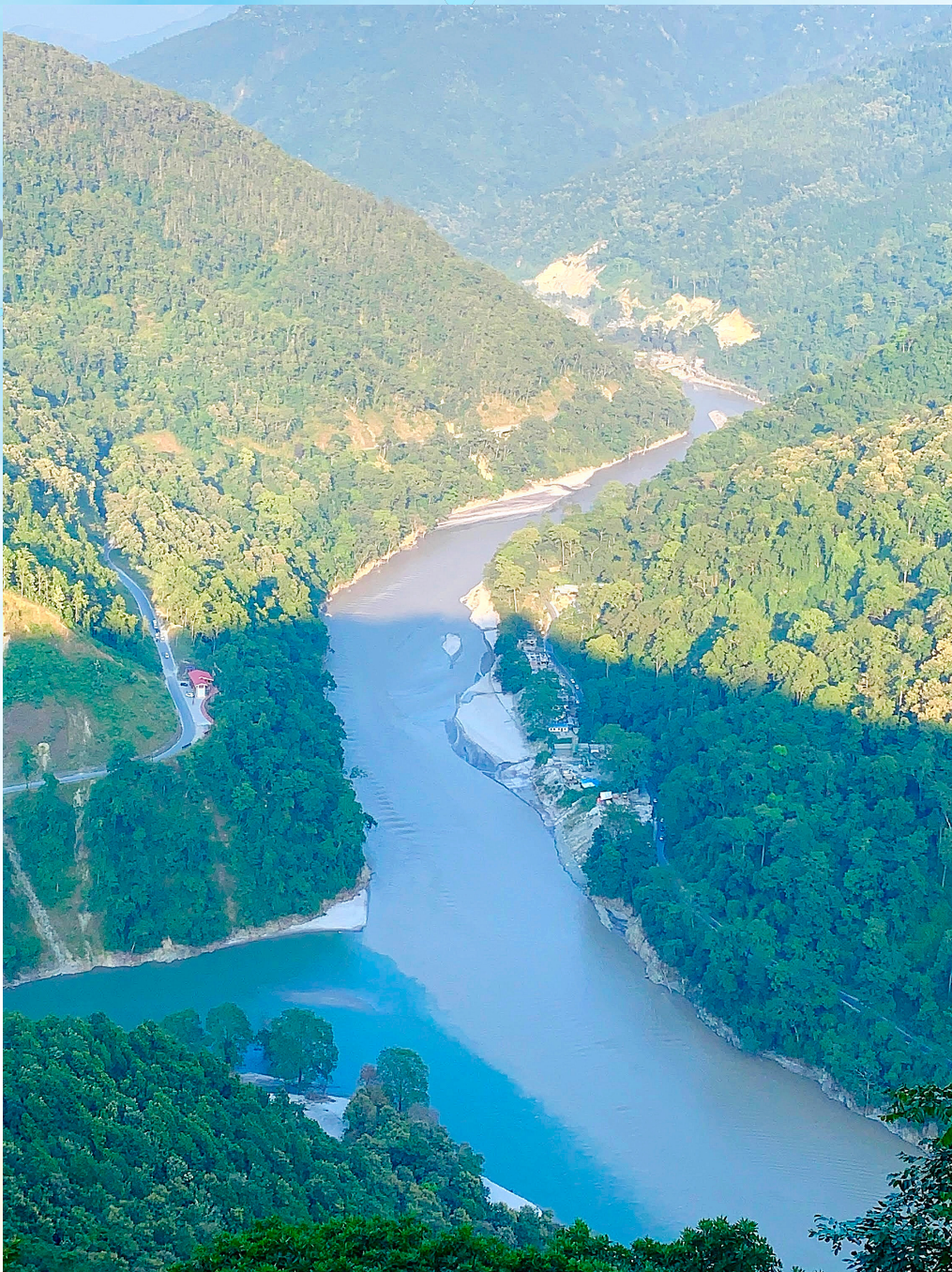
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Email:

confluence.ssjgc@gmail.com (Journal)

ssjalancollege@gmail.com (Institution)

M: +916289835475

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Corresponding Editor: Dr. Pragyan Mohanty,
Principal, Seth Soorajmull Jalan Girls' College,
8/9, Bankim Chatterjee Street, College Square,
Kolkata-700073, West Bengal, India.
Email: pragyan70@gmail.com

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Aisha Haleem

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Editorial

It is a matter of great pleasure to present the Volume 1, Issue 2 (December 2025) of *Confluence: Journal of Humanities, Social Sciences & Commerce* (ISSN: 3107-5568), an online, peer-reviewed, open-access multidisciplinary International journal published by Seth Soorajmull Jalan Girls' College (affiliated to the University of Calcutta), Kolkata, West Bengal, India. For this December Issue of *Confluence*, we received more than 60 submissions, of which we have published 30 original research articles and 2 book reviews after rigorous peer review and editing.

True to its name, the present issue of *Confluence* reflects a wide range of scholarship, spanning literary studies, cultural theory, political thought, history, philosophy, education, environmental studies, economics, and indigenous and folk traditions. The contributions engage deeply with questions of identity, power, resistance, gender, marginality, ethics, pedagogy, sustainability, and social transformation—concerns that remain central to contemporary academic and societal discourse.

While **Section I** foregrounds literary and cultural criticism, with essays that interrogate media narratives, necropolitics, feminism, disability studies, caste, postcolonial resistance, and modernist aesthetics, **Section II** increases the journal's interdisciplinary reach through analyses of regional culture, international relations, tourism, posthumanism, publishing practices, and spirituality. **Section III** is devoted to education and psychology, offering discussions on assessment, digital pedagogy, teacher preparedness, policy frameworks such as NEP 2020, and lifelong learning. **Section IV** enriches the volume with studies rooted in Bengali folk traditions and philosophical thought, reaffirming the journal's commitment to indigenous knowledge systems and vernacular scholarship. **Section V**, comprising book reviews, provides critical engagement with recent works in Indian literary and subaltern studies, extending scholarly dialogue beyond original research articles.

We sincerely thank our contributors for their rigorous scholarship, our reviewers for their meticulous evaluations, and the members of the Editorial and Advisory Boards for their continued guidance and support. We also acknowledge the unwavering encouragement of the administration of Seth Soorajmull Jalan Girls' College in nurturing this academic venture.

We hope this issue of *Confluence* will inspire meaningful dialogue, interdisciplinary engagement, and further research. We warmly invite scholars, researchers, educators, and students to contribute to and engage with future issues of *Confluence* as the journal continues its interdisciplinary journey across ideas and disciplines.

Dr. Pragyan Mohanty

Editor-in-chief

Kolkata.

December 31, 2025

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Notes on Contributors

1. **Dr. Sabuj Sarkar** is an Assistant Professor at the Department of English, University of Gour Banga, P.O. - Mokdumpur, Malda, West Bengal, India. Email: sabuj.ugb@gmail.com
2. **Dr. Rakes Sarkar** is an Assistant Professor of English at Kalna College (UG & PG), Burdwan, West Bengal, India. He has obtained his PhD from Kazi Nazrul University, Asansol, West Bengal, India. Email: rakessarkareng@gmail.com
3. **Dr Barun Naha** is an Assistant Professor at the Department of English, Surendranath College for Women, Kolkata. His areas of research interest include Victorian studies, dreams, adventure literature, and music and film studies. Email: nahabarun1986@gmail.com
4. **Dr. Soumyadip Ghosh** is an Assistant Professor at the Department of English, North Bengal St. Xavier's College. He has obtained his PhD from the University of North Bengal. His areas of interest include experimental poetry, cultural studies, and critical theory. He is also a member of the Kolkata 'Translators' Forum. Email: sdg92.slg@gmail.com
5. **Ashish Awasthi** is a Research Scholar in the Department of English at C.M.P. College, University of Allahabad, Prayagraj. He has earned his Bachelor's and Master's degrees in English from Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi, India. Email: ashish.bbhc@gmail.com
Dr Ram Prakash Gupta is an Assistant Professor in the Department of English at C.M.P. College, University of Allahabad, Prayagraj, since 2018. He has earned his PhD from Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi, India. Email: ramprakashgupta@gmail.com
6. **Mursalim Sk** is an independent scholar with an M.A. in English literature from The Sanskrit College and University, Kolkata. His research interests include ecocriticism and disability studies. He has been teaching at a private school in Murshidabad. Email: mursalimsk1837@gmail.com
7. **Dr. Deepanjali Baruah** is an Assistant Professor in English at Jagannath Barooah University, Jorhat, Assam. She is interested in Literature, Cultural Studies, Film Studies, Folklore, and Translation Studies. Email: deepanjalibaruah73@gmail.com
8. **David Das** is an Assistant Professor at the Department of English, Kabi Nazrul College, Murarai, Birbhum, West Bengal, India. His research interests include cultural studies, Postcolonial literature, Partition literature, short stories, and dramas. Email: daviddas563@gmail.com
9. **Nongthombam Liklaileima** is a Research Scholar in the Department of English and Cultural Studies at Manipur University, Manipur, India. Her research explores themes of identity, culture, and displacement in contemporary fiction, with a particular focus on the

works of Monica Ali. Her academic interests include diaspora literature, feminist studies, and postcolonial theory. Email: liklainong@gmail.com

10. Sayonti Mukherjee is a Junior Research Fellow in the Department of English, Jadavpur University. Her research interests span Anglo-Indian Literature, Postcolonial Studies, Comics Studies, and Gender Studies. She also pursues interdisciplinary creative interests as a trained Hindustani semiclassical vocalist. Email: sayontimukherjee1@gmail.com

11. Moumita Bhattacharjee is a postgraduate student of English literature at the University of Calcutta. She takes special interest in Partition literature, Subaltern Studies, Postcolonial literature, and Feminist ideology. She possesses extensive knowledge of translation studies, and her works have been published in multiple journals featuring translated fiction. She has earned a distance diploma certificate in Ancient Philosophy from the University of Edinburgh. Email: moumitabhattacharjee2004@gmail.com

12. Tandrima Das is a Guest Faculty in English at Mahatma Gandhi University, Purba Medinipur. Her areas of interest include Migration studies, Memory studies, Trauma studies, and Gender studies. Email: tandrimaofficial25@gmail.com.

13. Suchetona Pal is a Research Scholar at the University of Calcutta. Her areas of research interest include Early Modern Drama, Popular Literature, and Gender and Cultural Studies. She also teaches drama and short stories to undergraduate students at Ramakrishna Sarada Mission Vivekananda Vidyabhavan. Email: amiya.yugen22@gmail.com

14. Rishanku Das is an Independent Researcher. He holds a Master's Degree in Islamic History and Culture from the University of Calcutta. He has a keen interest in socio-anthropological studies and syncretic patterns of Rural Bengal, alongside the importance of myths in such studies. Email: rishanku2002@gmail.com

15. Santu Halder is a PhD Research Scholar (SRF) in the Department of History, Jadavpur University, West Bengal, India. His areas of interest include History of Sports, Social and Cultural History, Regional History and Culture. Email: santuhalder2010@gmail.com

16. Prosper Malangmei is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Political Science at Maharaja Bodhchandra College (affiliated to Manipur University) in Imphal, Manipur. He is also pursuing a PhD in the Department of Political Science and Human Rights at Indira Gandhi National Tribal University, Regional Campus Manipur. Email: prospermalangmei@gmail.com

- 17. Dr. Vinay Limbu** is an Assistant Professor at the Department of Geography, Muralidhar Girls' College, West Bengal, India. Email: vinaylimbu233@gmail.com
- 18. Dr. Priyanka Basak** has been working as a Postdoctoral Fellow at the Indian Council of Philosophical Research, New Delhi. She earned her PhD from the Department of Philosophy, University of North Bengal. She is working on the human body, posthumanism, feminism, and the ethical concerns surrounding these issues. Email: basakpriyan@gmail.com
- 19. Dr. Aditya Ghosh** is an Assistant Professor in the Faculty of Liberal Arts, ICFAI University, Tripura, India. His areas of interest include Populism, Cultural Studies, Literary Theory, and Media Studies. He has authored two edited volumes titled *Postmillennial Texts and Contexts: Critical Inquiries* and *Knowledge, Society and Sustainability: Multidisciplinary Approaches*. Email: adityaghosh164@gmail.com
- 20. Kirtika Das** is a research scholar in the Department of Philosophy, University of North Bengal. Currently, she is a Senior Research Fellow with the UGC-SJSGC. Her research interests include Engaged Buddhism, Postmodernism, and Kantian Philosophy. Email: kirtikadas97@gmail.com
- 21. Dr Kingshuk Karan** is an Assistant Professor of Education at Mugberia Gangadhar Mahavidyalaya, Purba Medinipur, West Bengal. Previously, he served as a contractual lecturer in Scottish Church College (Dept. of Teacher Education), Kolkata. Email: kingshukkaran@gmail.com
- Dr Sujit Pal** is the Principal of the Institute of Education for Women (IEW) in Hastings House, West Bengal. Previously, he served as a Deputy D.P.I. (Deputy Director of Public Instruction) for Training in the Department of Higher Education, Government of West Bengal. Email: spalaug552@gmail.com
- 22. Debarati Das** completed an M.A. in Education from West Bengal State University and B.Ed. from Government College of Education, Banipur, West Bengal. She has received M. Phil. in Education from the University of Gour Banga, Malda, West Bengal. Email: debaratid71@gmail.com
- Kamalesh Karan** is an Assistant Professor & Head of the Department of Education at Kalyani Mahavidyalaya (University of Kalyani), West Bengal, India. He completed an M. Phil. in Education and a Postgraduate Diploma in Guidance and Counselling and Yoga Education from Ramakrishna Mission Sikshanamandira, Belur Math, West Bengal. He completed B.Ed. training from the Department of Education, University of Calcutta. He has authored two textbooks for undergraduate and postgraduate students in Education. Email: kamaleshkaran27@gmail.com

- 23. Dr. Adrija Chattopadhyay** is an Assistant Professor (Grade I) at the Amity Institute of Education, Amity University, Kolkata, West Bengal, India. Email: adadrija89@gmail.com
- Dr. Anamika Kar** is an Assistant Professor (Grade II) at the Amity Institute of Education, Amity University, Kolkata, West Bengal, India. Email: anamika.kar1@gmail.com
- Sanjoy Dutta** is an Assistant Professor at the Amity Institute of Education, Amity University Kolkata, West Bengal, India. Email: sanjoyduttanainanpara@gmail.com
- 24. Dr. Hafijul Shaikh** obtained his PhD from the Department of Education, The University of Burdwan, Purba Bardhaman, West Bengal, India. He served as an Assistant Professor in the foundation course in B.Ed. at Rishi Arabindo College of Education and served as a guest faculty member in Education at Kanyashree University. Email: hafijul.shaikh@gmail.com
- Prof. Khagendranath Chattopadhyaya, PhD**, serves as a Professor with 20+ years of experience at the Department of Education, The University of Burdwan, Purba Bardhaman, West Bengal, India. Email: knchatto@gmail.com
- 25. Dr. Sunita Kejriwal** is an Assistant Professor at the Department of Education, Maharani Kasiswari College, University of Calcutta. Email: goldeneyesunita@gmail.com
- Dr. Bipasha Sinha** is an Associate Professor at the Department of Education, Seth Soorajmull Jalan Girls' College, University of Calcutta. Email: bipashasinha@gmail.com
- 26. Moumita Patra** is an Assistant Professor at the B.Ed. Department, University B.T & Evening College, Cooch Behar, West Bengal, India. Email: peeu1987@gmail.com
- 27. Dr. Priyanka Bose Das** is an Assistant Professor at the Department of Education, Budge Budge College, West Bengal, India. Email: pbd4141@gmail.com
- 28. Paramita Sarkar Ranjit** is an Assistant Professor at the Department of Geography, Seth Soorajmull Jalan Girls' College, Kolkata, West Bengal, India. Email: pr.geography@gmail.com
- 29. Tanusree Mandal** is an Assistant Professor at the Department of Bengali, Government General Degree College, Kushmandi, Dakshin Dinajpur, West Bengal, India. Email: tanusreemandal4u@gmail.com
- 30. Dr Uday Sarkar** is an Assistant Professor at the Department of Philosophy, Seth Soorajmull Jalan Girls' College, College Square, Kolkata, West Bengal, India. Email: udaysarkar2@gmail.com
- 31. Meghna Borate-Mane** is a PhD Scholar at the English Department of the University of Mumbai. Her doctoral research investigates the representation of the natural environment in selected postcolonial graphic novels and seeks to define the environmental issues that have emerged over the course of eternal imperialism. She holds an M.A. in English from the

University of Mumbai. She has attended a summer semester at Heinrich Heine University, Düsseldorf, as part of the Student Exchange Programme while pursuing her Master's degree. Her research interests centre on graphic narratives, ecocriticism, zoocriticism, postcolonialism, subaltern studies, and gender studies. Email: megsb1592@gmail.com

32. Aisha Haleem is an Assistant Professor of English, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Shri Ramswaroop Memorial University, Lucknow-Deva Road, Barabanki, Uttar Pradesh, India. Email: dipakgiri84@yahoo.in



Myriad Mediation: Discourses on Media as a Research Tool with Reference to Tea Narratives

Sabuj Sarkar, PhD
Assistant Professor
Department of English,
University of Gour Banga, Malda,
West Bengal, India
Email: sabuj.ugb@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper discusses the inclusivity of media as a research tool, its myriad dimensions, and the technicalities involved. Research tools are the basic elements for deciphering the topic under question and guiding the way of thinking towards a tentative conclusion. In this paper, I have attempted to highlight the various possibilities and applications of media as a research tool for higher studies and research. This paper primarily focuses on the applications of media resources in tea narratives. Studies on tea, in recent times, is a rapidly growing field in the academic arena in different ways. This paper tries to establish that the media as a research tool can benefit all its possibilities in various ways. Media can mitigate the space underneath with the greater power dimensions available in academic and higher research.



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Email: confluence.ssjgc@gmail.com

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In the history of human knowledge, sources of knowledge formation are numerous. In Foucault, it is found that the ideas of “power” and “knowledge” are intertwined and are most of the time “conjoined” (Fruhling, 2011). People down the ages have tried to acquire knowledge empirically. While Socrates and Plato questioned authority, in the case of Aristotle, it was a new mode of teaching, with his students in his ‘Lyceum’ coming close to the subject of his teaching.

For nearly the remainder of his life, it was here that Aristotle lectured, wrote most of his philosophical treatises and dialogues, and systematically collected books for the first library in European history. After Aristotle’s death in 322 BC, the headship of the school passed to Theophrastus, who continued his master’s program of research and teaching in the Lyceum. (Morison, 2022)

Over time, there has been rapid development in the history of research tools. It has become more intensive as well as extensive. Recent observations would speak of particularisation. However, this process of knowledge acquisition is growing continuously and is expanding limitlessly. So, what is necessary today is to redefine it with its meaningfulness, keeping in mind the necessity of the time. Dupré and Somsen (2019) have shown that the historiographical domain has to be reinterpreted and re-evaluated since the present history of knowledge demands new ways of questioning the conditions of the time. It has to be problematized and re-evaluated. Moreover, ancient history shows the plethora of changes in the process of knowledge formation comparing the present status of the time. It was more philosophically enriched, if not shallow. That is why, probably, Aristotle is found on all platforms: Philosophy, Political science, Literature, Theory of Poetry, History, Ethics, and even biological sciences.

It is true that during Renaissance England, Francis Bacon questioned the monopoly of the Aristotelian concept of the theory of poetry and tragedy as described in Aristotle’s *Poetics*. He went on his experiments with the idea of human knowledge and enquiry. Reflections of which can be found in his famous *Essays*. Furthermore, his utopian texts reflect his ideas for aspirations more prominently. From the Renaissance to the present time, the gradual development of human knowledge, research, and enquiry has passed through multifaceted, disturbed, mysterious, and often ambiguous phases. Christopher Marlowe’s Doctor Faustus is one of such characters through whom this journey of the troubled path can partially be felt. Stephen Leacock’s article “Further Progress in Specialization” is an excellent piece that satirizes and questions the process of “specialization” in further studies (De, 2022). Despite the acerbic tone in the narrative, the text tries to contextualize the modern dilemma in the academic field and its unavoidable consequences.

Contextualizing Media

The development of media in the cultural and academic fields no doubt intervenes with a sense of wonder. There is a huge difference between the pre-media and the impression of the media-centric context. Media propels, motivates, instigates, and often confuses, too. However, the contribution of the media can hardly be denied. At a time of the explosion of information, the media controls the whole process of communication and also miscommunication. In the long history of research, a researcher particularizes and investigates the various issues and the elements of data before applying them to the research topic. As in the cases of primary data, secondary data are similarly important. Since the journey of a researcher is always very tentative and hypothetical, like many other sources, he has no choice but to take help from the media and media resources. Media as a research tool is multilayered, diverse, diffusing, and disparate. As a

research tool, media coalesces together and conglomerates the data into a new vista, leaving no option for any mono-layered unit. In the introduction of *Knowledge Worlds: Media, Materiality, and the Making of the Modern University*, Reinhold Martin (2021) writes:

A world is, in this sense, both a knowable thing and a cognitive environment, a sphere of knowledge and of action. Media are socially produced objects and systems that bring worlds into view, admitting and excluding subjects like any entrance exam. (Martin, 2021)

Media is a huge corpus of communication processes or systems. A network unbounded, media has the option to be connected globally, irrespective of culture, class, and national and international boundaries. Media systematizes the information process and places it in front of the target audience methodically. History shows how old universities in England were partial to class sensitivities and gave more importance to the social hierarchies and cultural heritage. As time passed, such class and monetary differences were now mitigated. Education and higher studies through e-resources and taking help from media resources are now proven to be more budget-friendly, keeping in mind the present situation. It also addresses questions about the long history of racism. Globally, the issues of racism, class distinctions, and cultural differences concerning educational platforms are now bearable, if not wiped out.

Addressing Castism and Gender with reference to Media

Casteism and education had a long and chronic relationship in a country like India. India's social and cultural history has witnessed how most Indian people hardly had access to education. Dr. B. R. Ambedkar is one of the examples and one of the prime victims. Boldness in spirit enabled him to brave all the evils of society and finally fight against the odds of reaching the destination. The numerous writings of Ambedkar are the testaments of the subalterns and the Dalits who were bereft of education and all other necessary privileges required of a human being. Such discrimination in Indian society was rampant, if not removed or obliterated from the society. Pranjali Kureel's article "Indian Media and Caste: Of Politics, Portrayals and Beyond" also investigates the basic enquires of casteism in India and how media is still being operated by the cultural hegemony (Kureel, 2021). Those who belong to the upper strata of society are still in the helm while the situation of the media gets highlighted. The reflection in society is minimal, and the majority are the victims of cultural supremacy. In the case of education and higher studies, the portraiture of the same is evident.

Gender and education were other significant, unavoidable issues for which early women had limited access to education in Indian society. For those who went for higher studies, the number of such candidates is a handful only. Education was for a select few, not for all. Women were the worst victims. For a long time, women thought that they hardly needed any education. Moreover, they were considered dependent on the males. This picture was not significantly different even in Western countries. Feminist writers in the West have talked a lot about the conditions of women in society in general, particularly on the right to vote, education, and financial dependence; they all have talked about these issues. Virginia Woolf, Mary Wollstonecraft, and Simone de Beauvoir have tried to connect women's education and financial self-dependence.

Media minimizes several such issues, but it has its shortcomings too. The expanse of media is vast and enormous. According to many scholars, today's media has its own predecessors. For example, the 'cave paintings' should also be considered the early forms of

communication. Human minds have always attempted to expand their knowledge. As for the ways of communication, human beings have devised several plans and techniques. 'Media' is one of the major ones. The audio-visual mode of communication helps to get fixed in the mind for a long time. The media plays that significant role. Retention is certainly the biggest help that 'media' makes during academic platforms and in the case of research works. Media always opens up new windows for the thinking process, broadens the intellectual platform, and enkindles new approaches to discuss and disseminate. The media itself is a package that covers multiple dimensions.

Media as a Research Tool

Media as a research tool comes up the very best during the lockdown period of COVID-19. A tenure that shuts down man-to-man contact, disconnected physical associations, and practised media as the only resource in academic and research fields. Even when people got tired of being entertained and psychologically refreshed through media sources, the biggest hindrance in online classes was that not many could afford the cost of the internet. The internet is, of course, cheaper in India but not free. Hence, it is unexpected that it is not free for all. Only a handful in society can afford the internet. So, here comes the question of the "digital divide." Those who stay in the village have less access to the internet. If scholars, researchers, or students stay in the remote areas of the village, full-length signal or "no-buffering" streaming is often unavailable to them. They are victims of the "digital divide." A stable internet connection is always required for the smooth functioning of Google Meet, Zoom meetings, and online classes. Nevertheless, the "digital divide" could hardly make a balance between the two.

Besides these network and financial issues, media is beneficial in every possible way. Access to a digital gallery, archive, or national or international library database was only possible through media opportunities. During the lockdown of COVID-19, several international Digital platforms were found to come up with helping hands and the opportunities to access digital libraries free of cost. In some cases, they also minimized the cost of the subscription. JSTOR is one such digital archive that offered scholars worldwide during this time the possibility to access research articles with minimum cost or with some other alternatives, in which read-only options were open for all scholars across the globe. "Archive.org" is another big name in the digital archive scenario, where one can access digital texts and documents without any cost. In India, several other platforms cater to these opportunities for scholars in general. The government of India and the Education Department took several such initiatives to provide researchers with relevant information digitally. "Inflibnet" is one such project that catered to this opportunity for college and university teachers, scholars, and researchers across the country.

Recently, we have also seen how IIT Kharagpur and several such institutions have prepared digital access to many academic and digitized critical research-oriented texts for the greater benefit of scholars. Such access to the websites and the texts is free and research-friendly. Such media contributions cannot be denied for higher studies and for the sake of research. It comes with a sense of freedom and justice. A Digital library offers the freedom to access research materials on any device, anywhere, and anytime. In a period of globalization, such easy access to the research tool is undoubtedly a great innovation. However, the environment of a physical library can not be denied. A physical library is more of a space that helps to think and write. A physical library enhances getting in touch with the environment and capacity building

while being a part of the academic environment in general. A physical library materialises the process of intellectual development and activates the process of creative faculty.

Media and Tea Narrative

Since this article primarily focuses on tea narratives and how research could be conducted on them, it explores the subtle relationship between media and its role across various aspects of tea narratives. The role and contribution of the media in research work are hard to deny, particularly in the field of tea studies. Research on tea is field-based work. Furthermore, most of it is connected to the library when the approach to the study is scientific. However, from the humanities and social sciences angle, it comes up with diverse and multifaceted possibilities.

Media undoubtedly plays a significant role in tea narratives among all the research tools. While working on the tea narratives, only a handful of tea fiction exists. Regarding the tea poems, there is hardly anything in a consolidated form. Most creative works are poorly arranged, well-documented, and easily accessible. So, a researcher working on the tea narratives must be very difficult. The rest of the materials focus on scientific approaches to tea production, how productivity can be further increased, the problems of labour and workers, labour unrest, male and female workers, and issues related to daily wage earning. When there is a dearth of materials, the media significantly minimizes hindrances while dealing with tea narratives. While working on tea media, the gap or vacuum supplies a handful of documentaries on tea and tea-growing areas in different parts of India. Such documentaries, i.e., media resources, no doubt, are great responses to move through this journey in other ways. Such resources are pictorial, methodical, planned, and well organized, and they systematize the whole process in such a way that consolidates the project of writing in its way. Documentaries on social media, YouTube, and similar platforms help go directly to the topic and subject of the tea narratives. It questions and addresses some of the loopholes connected to the tea narratives. Since such a presentation of the topic would not have been possible merely by reading the texts. What exactly is happening in the tea gardens and how are the persons, owners, and workers involved there connected in nexus and power relations are best exemplified through these documentaries. The lively presentation of the documentaries helps the researchers feel the environment of the tea garden in real life. It also highlights the nuances of the tea garden narratives in general.

Along with documentaries, general videos, interviews, and related media resources are other relevant and significant electronic materials for research and higher studies. Videos prepared unofficially or with personal initiatives also help a researcher visualise the scenario of the tea garden in general. It also helps to go deeper into the pros and cons of the context, raising questions regarding the vulnerabilities of the tea narratives. Such videos help a researcher compare and contrast the various trajectories and loopholes in the case of the tea narratives. Such videos help map and present the threatening conditions faced by workers, braving the inequalities and the uneven distribution of power and authority as seen in the tea estates and gardens. Interviews are a more lively aspect of research materials. The recorded question-and-answer session, available on social media, helps scholars and researchers get in touch with it several times when and if required. In this case, the best aroma that a lively recorded interview can offer is the essence of the garden and the place, without which it would not have been possible.

One of the powerful ways of communication is film. It is also one of the major tea narratives. Media helps connect with films that address tea issues. As a research tool, the film as

a media source is always a strong one. Several films are made based on the intricacies of tea life and its culture. The subaltern reading of the tea workers is always vibrant in the films on tea. The anxiety and the struggle between the owners and the workers are the necessary per dynamics reflected in the tea writings. As a research tool, the tea narrative in film media helps foreground basic indigenous culture and customs through myths, songs, dance, and related practices. Film as a research tool epitomizes society's connections and conflicts across multiple layers and helps relate the whole setup, giving a strong thrust to the mind. It also questions cultural norms and the issues associated with them.

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**'Death-worlds' and 'care of the self' – Re-invoking Foucault
in mapping the literary reflection of Mbembe's necropolitical
'death-worlds' and resistance in Neel Mukherjee's *Choice*.**

Rakes Sarkar, PhD
Assistant Professor
Department of English,
Kalna College,
Purba Bardhaman, West Bengal, India
Email: rakessarkareng@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper is an attempt to read Neel Mukherjee's latest novel, *Choice*, in the light of Achille Mbembe's concept of 'death-worlds' developed in the essay *Necropolitics*. Mbembe opines that Foucault's notion of biopower cannot adequately explain the contemporary 'power of death'. A close textual analysis of Mukherjee's novel reveals that the incorporation of another important concept of Foucault- 'care of the self' – may be considered to be an important factor shaping and influencing the lives of the marginalized characters like the illegal immigrant Salim, or poor villagers like Pulak and Sabita who are all forever dwindling in the 'death-worlds' in this novel. The textual analysis also reveals that the 'logic of survival' that Mbembe explains in relation to 'death of the other' may often be oriented towards self, family and community (as reflected in Ayush's emphasis on empathy and understanding in a world dominated by economics or in Emily's donation of kidney to Karim), thereby unveiling the possibility of an ethical and of resistant mode of living, however futile these may seem to be. The intervention of Foucauldian 'care of the self' with its extended signification of embracing the care of the 'other' in understanding the aspirations and struggle of 'death-worlds' in this novel thus turns out to be a validation of Mbembe's concluding observation about the blurring of boundaries between 'resistance and suicide, sacrifice and redemption, martyrdom and freedom'.

Keywords: death-worlds, care of the self, bio-power, resistance, freedom.



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Introduction

One of the key factors in our world is the politics surrounding death. Literature, like other disciplines, has been quite naturally alert to respond to its various ambiguities. Political, social, economic, psychological, and many other factors contribute to people's habitation in the space of marginalization that Achille Mbembe has termed 'death-worlds', which are devoid of security and care. Is there any way out? Is there any resistance offered by people of the 'death-worlds'? While Mbembe cites some of the resistant responses (most of which center around death) like suicide bombing and argues that our civilization has travelled farther from the reflection of Foucauldian biopower, it is the concern of this paper to argue that resistance of such marginalized people can revolve around life and care, the twin aspects related to another of Foucault's later theoretical coinage—the care of the self. In an age of transdisciplinary thinking this paper seeks to explore the literary reflection of the 'care of the self' of people in the 'death-worlds' in the latest novel of a novelist whose works have always been replete with characters who have withered in the 'death-worlds', but not before voicing or attesting their resistance.

Understanding Death-worlds

Achille Mbembe is one of the initiators of the concept of necropolitics, first developed in his article 'Necropolitics'. The goal of Mbembe's article has been to understand and explain the contemporary forms of sovereignty focused on death as reflected in cases like the South African apartheid or the Israel-Palestine conflict. Mbembe argues that such contemporary modes of 'subjugation of life to the power of death' (necropolitics) cannot be satisfactorily explained by Foucault's concept of bio-power, which is chiefly concerned with life (Mbembe, 2003, p.39). According to Mbembe, one of the major consequences of necropower in the contemporary world is the formation of 'death-worlds' which he defines as 'new and unique forms of social existence in which vast populations are subjected to conditions of life conferring upon them the status of living dead' (Mbembe, 2003, p. 40). Mbembe not only talks about the collective experience of death-worlds but also about the resistance exercised in the 'spaces of everyday life' like the suicide bomber (Mbembe, 2003, p. 36). The question is whether, even when such resistance is operating on the modalities of death, is the focus on life forever absent? Mbembe himself asserts that in the contemporary scenario, 'the disciplinary, the biopolitical, and the necropolitical are combined' (Mbembe, 2003, p. 27). And therefore, it can be safely deduced that the rejection of Foucault's notion of biopower is never carried to the extreme. On the other hand, the little acts of resistance that Mbembe frequently cites may invite the intervention of another Foucauldian formulation—care of the self—as an effective tool or strategy of fight in the death-world.

'Care of the Self'

The concept of 'care of the self' is associated with the later phase of Foucault's career, which is marked by the so-called 'ethical turn' of his critical theory. This concept is discussed exclusively in the third volume of his *The History of Sexuality*, titled *The Care of the Self*. The same concept has been explained and elaborated in many other works and seminar talks by Foucault, under terms such as 'hermeneutics of the self' or 'technologies of self'. As studied by Fruchaud and Lorenzini, Foucault's lecture series 'The Hermeneutics of the Subject' of 1981-1982 and several

other lectures of 1982 deal with the ‘care of the self’, the culmination of which occurred in the third volume of *The History of Sexuality* (Fruchaud, 2021, vii-viii). In all these deliberations, Foucault traces the evolution of the care of the self from the Greco-Roman tradition to the Christian one. According to Foucault, the care of the self in its Platonic-Socratic conception was primarily a preparation for political future and secondarily, one of revelatory and exploratory self-knowledge; while the early Roman imperial culture extended its significance to a lifelong practice relating to desire, passion and even spirituality: ‘A new form of subjectivity is thus constituted through practices such as reading, writing... as well as a series of exercises or tests...’ (Fruchaud, 2021, p. xiii). Foucault sees in Christian tradition an inversion of the ancient practice of care of the self, whereby extensive practices have been lost. Foucault thus looks upon the Roman imperial period as the acme of the practices of care of the self. Some crucial ‘functions’ relating to it were a ‘critical’ one, another of ‘struggle’, and the third of a therapeutic one. The critical function is one of unlearning and avoiding the traps of ‘all bad habits and false opinions’ (Foucault, 2024, p.76). The second one is one of permanent struggle, as an individual has ‘to fight his entire life’ (Foucault, 2024, p.77). In the therapeutic function, the role of writing becomes one of the prominent techniques of the self. One of the chief features of the care of the self is that it embodies concrete practices: ‘What I mean is that this culture of the self was not just a philosophical idea, but it really was a practice, a social and an individual practice’ (Foucault, 2024, p. 84). Foucault is aware of the fact that in the course of human history the care of the self ‘becomes broader and its meanings are both multiplied and modified’ (Foucault, 2005, p. 10). It is in these extended significances that we need to interpret our contemporary problems, since Foucault categorically points out that looking back to antiquity never provides us with ready solutions but only enables us to better understand our problems.

Now, is this self in ‘care of the self’ a selfish or self-centered one? Or is this a step towards ethical development of concern for others? Critics are divided in their interpretation of Foucauldian care of the self. For instance, Ella Myers discovers ‘specter of solipsism’ in Foucault’s formulation of ‘care of the self’ and argues that it is actually limited in its scope by emphasizing the isolation of individuals rather than solidarity with others (Myers, 2008, p.138). McLaren, on the other hand, reads Foucault’s later work as an exploration of the ‘self as social, as being constituted through relations to others’ (McLaren, 1997, p. 111). Foucault’s own observations are quite clear on this point: ‘Around the care of the self, there developed an entire activity of speaking and writing in which the work of oneself on oneself and communication with others were linked together... Here we touch on one of the most important aspects of this activity devoted to oneself: it constituted, not an exercise in solitude, but a true social practice’ (Foucault, 1986, p.51). Here, ‘social practice’ evidently points out the cohesive connections between self and others. And more importantly, this relationship with other/others is not one of exploitation and domination, but of mutual trust, assistance, and bonding: ‘But it is sometimes the case, too, that the interplay of the care of the self and the help of the other blends into preexisting relations, giving them a new coloration and a greater warmth. The care of the self... appears then as an intensification of social relations’ (Foucault, 1986, p. 53).

Since this care of the self is an attempt towards developing bonds with others, it can be safely assumed that it is poised as either subtle or manifest resistance against domination. In the

words of Nicolet-Anderson, ‘This reflection on an ethics of the self also emerges as a possible option for resisting the disciplining and normalizing effects of bio-power’ (Nicolet-Anderson, 2012, p. 173). That is why Foucault himself has argued about the necessity of considering ‘technologies of the self’ together with ‘techniques of domination’ (Foucault, 1997, p.177). Following Edward McGushin, Sarah Posman contends, ‘The care of the self that Foucault argues for is less self-love than an agitated state of self-reflexivity—*souci* in the French title *Le souci de soi*, means worry more than tenderness—in which one continuously checks oneself, and strives to attain a state of freedom by mastering oppressive forces rather than being enslaved by them’ (Posman, 2017, p.186). The next section will try to explore how care of the self in its extended sense of care for others may be considered to be a mode of resistance in the death-world of domination and control in Neel Mukherjee’s *Choice*.

Care beyond calculation

The very first section of Neel Mukherjee’s *Choice* depicts the pervasive presence of economic calculation. ‘Neel Mukherjee’s *Choice* tackles economics, identity, and the burden of morality’, writes Tabish Khair, and he adds that the three sections of the novel have in common ‘the stony backdrop of economics’ (Khair, 2024). The novel projects multiple confrontations between Ayush and Luke, for whom the question is always the larger economical one, as he is a staunch believer in ‘the truth of numbers over the truth of representation’ (Mukherjee, 2024, p.11). Ayush, on the other hand, tries to assert the role and significance of the little acts and contributions of an individual in bringing about effective change in the future. For Ayush, ‘everything hinges on the individual’ as he firmly believes that ultimate solution ‘lies within private choices’ (Mukherjee, 2024, p.101). The family life of Ayush and Luke as a gay couple is dominated by economical calculation, which is reflected in the repetition of Luke’s motto—‘Economics is life, life is economics’—throughout the first section of this novel. The conflict between Ayush and Luke goes so far that at one point, Luke moves away to his parents’ home for a weekend. Ayush constantly suffers from psychological anxieties in his personal as well as professional realities, making life difficult for him. His constant suffering in his home as well as in his workplace, caused by his unconventional points of view, makes his life a veritable ‘death-world’ against which he struggles desperately to retain sanity and sense.

Sayari Debnath observes that Ayush’s humanitarian concerns are fake: ‘His noble pursuits are often propelled by staggering displays of self-pity. The concern that he shows towards the environment, or livestock, or the poor, seems like a gimmick to compensate for his own insecurities about race, profession, and earning capabilities’ (Debnath, 2024). But the fact is that Ayush desperately tries to practice differently in actual life. Chakraborty justifiably says that Neel Mukherjee successfully explores Ayush’s ‘agony, his insomnia, as absorbingly believable’ (Chakraborty, 2024). His concrete practices and his desperate efforts to translate his apparently unusual ideas into palpable reality are what invite the application of Foucauldian ‘care of the self’ in his case. When the novel opens, we find Ayush showing a film about the cruelty to and preservation of animals to his children. Later, we find him engaged in everyday practical research, like the reduction of energy and water consumption. He gives away money to charities of climate change. When his partner Luke asks him whether he was ‘indoctrinating the kids’, he confidently asserts that he was only teaching them about ‘choices and their consequences’ so that they can question the ‘so-called naturalness’ of our daily habits and activities (Mukherjee,

2024, p.23). Ayush wants to live life differently and wishes for a different humanitarian future for the children. When he finds Luke teaching prime numbers to the children, he broods, 'Will the children learn about the things that really matter in both life and in the living of a life, things such as plants and flowers and insects and birds and trees, not just about prime numbers, and market forces, and resource allocation, and preferences?' (Mukherjee, 2024, p.74). The children once innocently asked him about their male parents. Ayush realizes instantly that they are asking like 'something learned by rote, delivered without thinking' (Mukherjee, 2024, p.84). He playfully explains, 'Well, some things are wrong to some people, and others not... We can live together happily, with each of us, or groups of us, thinking different things, doing different things, but loving each other' (Mukherjee, 2024, p.84).

Ayush once comes across Ritika Santosh, an economist. When she shares her experience of a project of transfer of assets to eradicate poverty, Ayush expresses his concern with the 'tiny fraction' of the project that failed (Mukherjee, 2024, p.78). Ayush is also ill at ease with the profit motive dominating in the publication industry where he works. The international publishing industry 'pushes the definition of literary towards whatever sells' (Mukherjee, 2024, p.8). Ayush is persistently aware that the celebrated 'nobility and indispensability of literature' hides 'what is ultimately business' (Mukherjee, 2024, p.43). He is often baffled by the money-centeredness of human civilization at the expense of other serious issues. The novel consistently projects him as a person who is always 'at war with whatever or in whatever he finds himself, never settling, or settling down, with what is given' (Mukherjee, 2024, p.32). Critical reflection on oneself or thinking critically about one's own opinions and actions is an essential part of Foucault's 'care of the self'. Diana Taylor interprets that the individual's 'critically reflective activity' can enable 'new and different ways of relating to ourselves and others' (Taylor, 2011, p. 173). Ayush clearly exhibits such activities in his everyday life, especially in his rearing of the two children. What is more important, his understanding of the lives of trees, animals and the force of environment and his earnest efforts to infuse this sensitivity to the children is at par with what Foucault interpreted as the expanded notion of the care of the self and asserted that the '*epimeleiaheautois* an attitude towards self, others, and the world' (Foucault, 2005, p. 10).

In such a time of easy accessibility of information and advertisement, a writer called M.N. Opie refuses to reveal any personal information to the publisher. By such constant refusal to disclose even the contact number, Ayush is thrilled to realize that this writer is refusing 'to play the game' (Mukherjee, 2024, p.55). The thought of M.N. Opie boosts up Ayush's confidence in crisis as he interprets Opie's decision as 'an act of defiance, two fingers to the world...' (Mukherjee, 2024, p.100). The frequent references to M.N. Opie's case amidst the description of Ayush's discomfiture with the money-driven publishing industry highlight the value of an individual's resistance through refusal.

Care and Cure

The second section of the novel is the story of Emily, who faces an accident and then suffers from a psychic breakdown. Instead of contacting the police, she meets the driver, Salim, who turns out to be a refugee from Eritrea. Emily once wanted to write a novel based on the colonial roots of her mother's family. She urged her mother to remember stories of 'conflicts and fighting and bombs going off' in colonial India (Mukherjee, 2024, p.151). She was thus

more interested in the stories of oppression and domination rather than the glories of colonialism. She even argues with her mother over this issue. Her contact with Salim enlightens another shadowy part of contemporary affairs. She transcends the barriers of language, class, race, and many others in her interaction with Salim. She probes into the unjust system of labour and wages of ride apps. She comes to learn that he works as a substitute for his ailing brother, Karim. Salim first escaped from war-torn Eritrea to Sudan and then to Libya for the promise of a 'regular job, a better life, papers' (Mukherjee, 2024, p.169). But he was sold as a slave again, and still he dreamt of 'a new life, a better life, a decent working life' in Europe (Mukherjee, 2024, p.170). He was able to reach Italy, and then London, and eventually realized that there was no escape from his death-world: 'I no see difference between Eritrea and Europe—I not free in any place' (Mukherjee, 2024, p.172). Knowing about Salim and writing about him matured Emily immensely and helped her get rid of her anxiety and depression. The therapeutic function of care of the self that Foucault discussed as one of the major features of ancient culture is manifested here in Emily's case in her care for others. Not only that, Emily's multiple conversations with Salim at various places, her patient listening to his narratives that constantly provokes doubt and authenticity may be considered to be modes of ancient culture of 'askesis' (self-training) that, according to Foucault, included 'abstinences, memorizations, examinations of conscience, meditations, silence and listening to others' (Foucault, 1982, p. 246-7). Emily donates a kidney to Karim, and when her friend Rohan warns her that this is not her story to write, Emily asserts, 'No, No, it's mine. It's my story too' (Mukherjee, 2024, p.200). Salim's detailed narrative about his life may be interpreted as instance of 'parrhesia' (truth-telling) that Foucault associates with the tradition of care of the self and explains as 'speech that is equivalent to commitment, to a bond, and which establishes a certain pact between the subject of enunciation and the subject of conduct' (Foucault, 2005, p. 406). Emily is unable to understand or explain the bond that develops with Salim, and yet she is able to accept his story as her own, affirming a clear ethical direction of her care of the self by donating her kidney. The narrative at this point clearly portrays the extended configuration of the self-other paradigm that Foucault sees as the evolved application of the care of the self, transcending the classical prototype of master-disciple. The second section is the only one of the three sections of this novel that depicts successful resolution of care of the self: 'The final purpose of parrhesia is to free the person to whom one is speaking, so that this person can enter in his or her own relationship to truth and constitute him or herself as a true subject' (Anderson-Nicolet, 2012, p. 193). Emily discovers her freedom both as a writer and as a human being in coming closer to Salim and Karim.

The third section of the novel is centered around a poverty-stricken family in a remote village called Nonapani. In that poor household, Sabita receives a cow as a gift. She works as a domestic cook as her husband's income is not sufficient. But there is no security of her job, as absence for some days often causes the loss of the month's wages for her. She lost her first child when she had to leave him for her work. After the day's work, she does not have any energy left to cook for her little children, and there is not much to cook. Sabita's world is a dismal death-world as it is constantly threatened by death, disease, and struggle. Even amidst dire poverty, however, Sabita believes that 'a solution has to be found, and she is the one who has to find it' (Mukherjee, 2024, p.217). Sabita's fight is as much psychological as it is physical. She leaves no stone unturned to stabilize their economic condition. She is even forced to send

her little daughter, Mira, to work. When she receives the gift of the cow, she is baffled to procure provisions for her, and yet the care of the self is extended to her as he cares for the animal, as she consoles the cow Gauri, 'Nothing to fear, I'll look after you. You are one of us now' (Mukherjee, 2024, p.225). The way she manages her psychological crisis is nothing but effective 'care of the self' that reminds one of Foucault: 'The care of the self implies a certain way of attending to what we think and what takes place in our thought' (Foucault, 2005, p. 11). The emotional bonding among Sabita and her children Mira and Sahadeb, the way they stand by one another even amidst dire poverty prove the validity of Foucault's observation that the 'care of the self' embraces relationships that are diverse: 'These relationships can be familial, or involve a protective aspect, but they can also be a friendship bond between two persons of similar age, status and culture' (Foucault, 2012, p. 192). All her desperate efforts and prolonged struggle, however, prove ineffectual: 'Every episode in her life. Every turn of events brings her face-to-face with her own absolute helplessness. She has power over nothing, power to do nothing' (Mukherjee, 2024, p.285). Even for a brief period, however, Sabita is able to live happily when she manages to sell the milk. Ultimately, she is defeated as she fails to find enough buyers for the milk. Eventually, her husband Pulak decides to sell Gauri across the border. The dream of fifty thousand rupees prompts Pulak to make the decision without the knowledge of anyone else: 'He was tired, he wanted to be liberated from this life of his. He wanted to liberate his wife and daughter from the lives they had' (Mukherjee, 2024, p.305). Ultimately, however, he grows desperate and thinks about his own liberation: 'Freedom from being ground down to dust under the burden of responsibility, of the labour needed to provide for a family' (Mukherjee, 2024, p.306). Towards the end, some people catch him near the border, and he is brutally killed.

Conclusion

The attempt of this paper has been to initiate a critical intervention of Foucauldian 'care of the self' in the understanding of the struggle and predicament of the individuals in the 'death-world' and explore the reflection of such intervention in Neel Mukherjee's *Choice*. Since Neel Mukherjee's *Choice* deals with the experiences of death-world of diverse characters (hailing from different parts of the globe and different class and gender), the 'care of the self' that these characters practice (since Foucauldian care insists on concrete practices) is also diverse and rich in possibilities. One of these practices is the association of 'care of the self' with care for others. Ayush's efforts to inculcate ethical concerns in the young children and his practice of an ethical life despite the socio-psychological obstacles that he constantly faces in his gay partnership with his economical partner Luke, the lifelong struggle of illegal refugees like Salim or the psychological struggle of survivors like Emily who is able to cure herself by coming in close contact with the lives of others or Pulak's initial reasons to sell Gauri to ensure the economic stability of his family and Sabita's perseverance are all classic instances of 'care of the self' that help the individuals to stay strong in the dismal death-world that they constantly face.

Question may be raised about the effectiveness of such care of the self and the related care of others, especially when one considers Ayush's final decision to relieve the pain of the pet retriever Spencer or Pulak's final decision to sell Gauri the cow to seek his own liberation from the burden of responsibilities. But the results of such individual decisions that are permeated with violence and death (a stark reminder of Mbembe's necropolitical death-worlds)

are all in one way or the other connected with 'care of the self' in its varied manifestations. Foucault has made it clear that the present culture of self is widely different from the ancient practices of which not all have disappeared (Foucault, 1982, p.251). When asked whether he was seeking to discover 'attractive and plausible alternative' in the ancient culture of self, Foucault instantly refuted: 'No! I am not looking for an alternative; you can't find the solution of a problem in the solution of another problem raised at another moment by other people' (Foucault, 1982, p.231). A close textual analysis of Mukherjee's novel reveals that surely not all aspects of the ancient culture of 'care of the self' have been lost. Foucault emphasized the importance of 'ethico-political choice' of our daily lives (Foucault, 1982, p. 232), and Mukherjee's novel exhibits the importance of choices and decisions that are inseparable parts of 'care of the self' and profoundly influence both the lives and deaths of the characters living in the death-worlds.

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Olive Schreiner's Allegorical Dreams and the Late Nineteenth-Century Woman Questions

Barun Naha, PhD

Assistant Professor

Department of English,

Surendranath College for Women,

Kolkata, West Bengal, India.

Email: nahabarun1986@gmail.com

Abstract:

In nineteenth-century England, there was a significant rise in the culture of interpreting and representing dreams in public life, literature, and scientific studies before the publication of Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900). The culture of dream interpretation was tremendously popular among the women, especially towards the end of the century. Dream interpretations and representations were divided between the age-old Biblical, prophetic, or supernatural, and the contemporary scientific or medical. The very act of dreaming was considered a feminine practice within Victorian androgynous ideology. It was a common belief that women subscribed to irrational, revelatory theories of dreams. Rhoda Broughton, a popular late-Victorian woman writer of sensation stories, represented and promoted this concept through her tales of dreams in *Tales for Christmas Eve* (1873). She supported this from a feminist perspective as a tool to counter the male rational ideology. However, her representation of dreams was unscientific and regressive. In this context, Olive Schreiner's approach to dreams becomes crucial. This article examines her allegorical dreams of the late Victorian period and seeks to explore, through textual hermeneutics, whether her dream representations were binary both to popular beliefs about dreams vis-à-vis women and to Broughton, an English woman writer's representations. It also seeks to examine how her representations of dreams served the woman's issues of the time, in relation to the same of Broughton.



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“For, ever from the earliest childhood to the latest age, day by day, and step by step, the busy waking life is followed and reflected by the life of dreams, — waking dreams, sleeping dreams. Weird, misty, and distorted as the inverted image of a mirage, or a figure seen through the mountain mist, they are still the reflections of a reality”.

-- Olive Schreiner, *The Story of an African Farm*, 1883.

Dream and its interpretations loomed large in nineteenth-century Britain before the publication of the groundbreaking psychoanalytical study of dreams in *The Interpretation of Dreams* by Sigmund Freud in 1900. The convention of interpreting dreams centred chiefly around the traditional – classical and Biblical – ways of regarding dreams as vehicles of prophetic messages, divine or demonic. Most of the nineteenth-century British women writers subscribed to this supernatural method of interpreting dreams despite the initiation of medical and psychological studies about the causes and meanings, or lack of meanings of dreams in England of the nineteenth century, especially towards its end. The British women writers generally took hold of the superstitious interpretations of dreams as a tool to counter the contemporary androgynous precept about dreaming as a meaningless activity of women, the weaker sex, and effeminate males. Such gendered and prophetic representations of dreams have been dealt with in my article “Are you sure that it meant nothing?” Prophetic Dreams and Women: A Study of Rhoda Broughton’s *Tales for Christmas Eve*” was published very recently. In this article, I have shown how Rhoda Broughton, a popular late Victorian British woman writer, emphasised the prophetic and irrational interpretations of dreams as a means of countering the then androgynous rational interpretations of dreams as something meaningless. Barun Naha (2025) has noted:

It is true that she has prioritised the prophetic over the scientific, the irrational over the rational, and the conventional over the contemporary, with regard to dream interpretations. But she seems to have done this deliberately to counter the authority of rationality which the dominant late Victorian androgynous ideology thought to be the sole domain of the males. She accepts this culture and makes it a privileged possession for her sex and turns what patriarchy regards as a condemnable activity into an object of exclusively feminine space of power and belief system (p. 89).

The convention of dream interpretation, explored in the last two decades of the nineteenth century, was given a crucial shape by Olive Emilie Albertina Schreiner (1855-1920), also a South African English woman writer of dreams and allegories. This article seeks to explore how Schreiner differs from Broughton in her interpretations and representations of dreams around the same time with regard to addressing the late nineteenth-century women's issues. Schreiner and her contemporary women writers saw the 1880s and 1890s as a time of immense possibility and hope for a better future. The future that she had hoped for, as is reflected in the dedication of *Dreams* – “To a small girl-child who may grasp somewhat of that which for us is yet sight, not touch” -- seemed to her as very much within reach even in her own time and certainly for the next generation (Schreiner, *Dreams*, 2003, p. 2). Schreiner’s interests in socialism, pacifism, feminism, and liberalism made her known as one of the pioneering and significant Anglophone novelists from South Africa and a forerunner to other New Woman writers of the *fin-de-siècle*, such as Mona Caird, George Egerton, and Sarah Grand. Largely self-educated and undaunted by

the prevailing male intellectuals, she struggled for years to create a narrative to feature the women's issues, especially their emancipation, out of the dominant discourses of social evolution and positivist science. Hence, she took up a writing process in which she remained self-confident, that of the allegorical, non-realist form, which she claimed was integral to her own self.

"By the 1880s, women were describing a whole range of social, political and economic constraints which acted as real bars to their freedom, and which needed urgent redress. In a changed and modern world, it seemed possible that women might demonstrate that they, too, were capable of thought and work equal to that of men," remarks Carolyn Burdett (2001) (p. 47). Schreiner was conscious of this turn-of-the-century social evolution of the emancipation of women and, right from the beginning, she strove to create narratives concerned with women's emancipation, while at the same time she remained equally aware of various modes of telling stories. If she was engaged in writing the argumentative and rational history of women, she also practised writing short allegorical tales and symbolic prose pieces to express the transcendental and psychic reality. The most striking form of her writing was her allegories, be it in the form of dream narratives or non-realist novels.

Schreiner (1911) was aware of the ways in which these allegorical dreams had the potential to express something which was beyond the capacity of the "argumentative prose" (p. 16). These allegories, according to her, articulate the emotions that the objective intellectual prose writings, in contrast, cannot. She emphasised the symbolic aspect of allegories as an art form which had "a deeper value" than her novels in the sense that they could embody a truth higher than plain realism (Cronwright-Schreiner, *The Letters*, 1924, p. 194). Her allegories are, like dreams, a sort of wish-fulfilment of not only hers but of all the women whose dreams were to apply their own rationality and choice as complete human and rational beings who deserve both freedom and love:

Schreiner's allegory is a wish-fulfilment; it answers in dream-life a question which in real life proved far more intractable – of whether women can have freedom and love. To have both, after all, presumed not only a transformation of women's lives, but also a transformation in men. And, if it be possible to have both, how, *short of dreaming*, might it be achieved? (Burdett, 2001, p. 47; my emphasis)

This is possibly the reason why Schreiner took recourse to the dream convention to express the wishes of her community and find possible means to fulfil them in all of her works, especially in allegories. Her affinity for the dream form has possibly been derived from the Biblical lessons that she had received from her missionary parents. But Schreiner was not only inspired by the Christian versions of dreams to employ them in her writings, but she was also aware of the contemporary medical studies of dreams. She had a psychological habit of having an incessant bout of daydreaming and night-dreaming throughout her life.¹ But these dreams never thwarted her works, rather they worked as a stimulus for her creative impulse, resulting in her keeping the term "dream" in the titles of all the volumes of her allegories -- *Dreams* (1890), *Dream Life and Real Life* (1893) and *Stories, Dreams and Allegories* (1923) – which were written during her intermittent stays in London and South Africa in the 1880s, resulting from a distinct and more unconscious form of writing after the rupture in her relationship with Karl Pearson.²

It is *Dreams*, a volume of eleven allegorical tales reflecting her most private concerns both as a colonist and a woman, which earned her the status of an extraordinary author of great

sensitivity. Ruth Parkin-Gounelas (1991) remarks in this regard, “Schreiner’s post-1881 work, which includes her important ‘Dreams’, would alone qualify her for serious consideration in any study of either Victorian or feminist writing” (p. 84). Gerald Monsman (1992) records the impact that Schreiner’s *Dreams* had left on the literary circle: “A quarter century after their appearance, Amy Wellington proclaimed that to those concerned with the social growth of women, “this volume of Olive Schreiner’s ‘Dreams’ – profoundly stirring allegories which have their place among the greatest in world-literature – is the complete expression of her peculiar power” (p. 50). However, not all the stories of this volume, despite the titular suggestion, do contain dreams in them, leading me to select and analyse only those which feature dreams prominently in *Dreams* and *Dream Life and Real Life*.

First published in *The Fortnightly Review* in August 1887, with the subtitle “Under a Mimosa Tree”, “Three Dreams in a Desert” features the allegorical journey of a woman from a desert land, symbolic of a spiritually dead land for women, to the land of Freedom. The entire sojourn is cast into three sleep dreams, with intermittent awakenings, of the unnamed narrator of the story. The story is set in an unspecified “African plain” where the narrator sleeps under a Mimosa tree and has “a curious dream”, the epithet “curious” intensifying the sense of mystery and curiosity involved in any dream (Schreiner, *Dreams*, 2003, p. 16). The first dream allegorically speaks of a woman’s lack of freedom and inability to make herself break free from “the hard-baked clay of Ancient Customs,” though she “once wandered free over the rocks [the Rocks of Language] with him.” The reason behind her present lowly status, the unnamed reporter informs, is that “ages ago the Age-of-dominion-of-muscular-force found her” and bound her “with the broad band of Inevitable Necessity” with “no hope for her,” leaving her helpless (pp. 16-17). The narrator’s dream ends with a light in the eyes of the woman, signifying the imminent fulfilment of her hope of breaking free from the clutches of “Ancient Customs” of the “Inevitable Necessity.” This dream speaks of the necessity of an evolutionary determinism that Schreiner talked about in her “Wollstonecraft Introduction” and *Woman and Labour*. This evolutionary necessity is represented through the cutting knife, a technological modernity that comes to aid the woman to cut the burden of ancient customs. But the removal of the burden is not just enough in the women’s struggle for emancipation. Neither the woman nor the man had anything to do with the mysterious and inescapable evolutionary process of so many ages. This first evolutionary dream, therefore, brings no relief for the dreamer who is still caught by the fierce heat of the day, metaphorically, the heat of androgynous oppressions.

Immediately after, the narrator has another dream in continuation of the first one. The dream shows that the woman, “seeking for the land of Freedom,” meets an old man holding the stick of Reason which he offers to the woman, to cross the dark river of Labour through the water of Suffering (p. 18). She is also instructed to remove “the mantle of Ancient-received-opinions” that she had worn in the desert and “take the shoe of dependence off” her feet with only the light white garment of Truth on her body that is worn in the land of Freedom” (pp. 18-19). In this dream, the desert landscape is categorically identified as African. In this dream, the woman’s struggles do not merely manifest evolutionary law; rather, she is seen to exercise her individual volition as she has to opt between Passion and Reason, choosing the latter. Burdett (2001) observes, in this connection, “She has had to trade love for wisdom and, in so doing, she makes the sacrifice which Freud ascribes to men in the founding of civilization. As I discuss in my introduction, in Freud’s account, it is this move away from sexual love and family which

makes women hostile to progress” (p. 82). In the final dream, the narrator sees the woman’s self-sacrifice for humanity has not gone in vain and, in consequence, “on the hills walked brave women and brave men, hand in hand. And they looked into each other’s eyes, and they were not afraid” (Schreiner, *Dreams*, 2003, p. 20). The dream breaks with the sinking of the sun, and the narrator leaves the place with the expectation that it will rise again and “these things will occur “IN THE FUTURE” (p. 20).

The first two dreams suggest ways of winning women’s emancipation, but they also highlight the gap between the ideal and the real in the story of progress. Berkman (1989) comments, “With “Three Dreams in a Desert” Schreiner introduces another form of boundary transcendence. This allegory telescopes the collective history of women past, present, and future, climaxing in an evocative vision of androgyny and female autonomy as well as male-female and female-female equality, comradeship, and affection” (p. 214). This story, set in Africa, is also seen as embodying a postcolonial resistance by Jade Munslow Ong (2018): “For Schreiner, both dreams and death cause rupture and fragmentation as these states of being (or non-being) are outside of the parameters of colonial control, and a later example of this occurs in the short allegory “Three Dreams in a Desert” (1887), where Schreiner uses dream to envision a location outside of a narrowly conceived view of teleological history and thereby articulate a specifically postcolonial resistance to imperialist culture” (p. 94). The desert landscape of the third dream is set in Africa. It represents the evolutionary journey of humanity and the wilderness in which women have been trapped for ages.

Schreiner got most of her stories from abrupt flashes of insight which, she claimed, came from her unconscious self. The same had happened with this story, which, as she shared with the poet Arthur Symons, had resulted from her unconscious mode of writing. Symons reports Schreiner’s sudden flash of the plot of the story: “She was walking over one of the bridges across the Seine, when suddenly all flashed upon her. She screamed aloud, and began to run up the Boulevard St Michel, and ran until she came to her lodgings, where she sat down and never rose until the allegory was finished” (Cronwright-Schreiner, *The Life*, 1924, p. 189). Schreiner had written “Three Dreams” as a part of her “sex-book” which was composed to counter Pearson’s anti-feminist approach in his opening paper for the “Men and Women’s Club”, in which he projected “women, her need, her mental and physical nature” as a scientific object for man to analysis (First & Scott, 1980, p. 148).³ Elizabeth Jay (2003), therefore, comments, “The form she had therefore chosen for her ‘sex-book’ mingled two genres so as to restore the balance disturbed by Pearson, that “sworn enemy of the emotion” (p. xx).

Unlike in the previous story in which the dreams came to the unnamed sleeping narrator from nowhere, the next allegorical story in *Dreams*, “A Dream of Wild Bees,” presents a pregnant mother’s dream, induced by some external natural factors, reminding one of the contemporary theory of association. The would-be mother, expecting her ninth child, was sitting beside a window with her knitting work. From outside the window, she was hearing the voices of children playing outside and the humming sound of wild bees. Gradually, she fell asleep and “had a weird brain-picture; she thought the bees lengthened and lengthened themselves out and became human creatures and moved round and round her” (Schreiner, *Dreams*, 2003, p. 22). The dream here has been iteratively described as a “weird brain-picture,” possibly as a response to the psychological explanation of dreams in which impressions of day’s events imprinted in one’s brain get reflected in dreams. In her dream, the human-shaped bees come to her one by one in

the allegorical form of Health, Wealth, Fame, Love, and Talent to offer their respective blessings for the unborn child. The mother also rejects their plentiful offerings of material gains for her future child, except for the blessing of Love. At the end, a bee appears, and it promises the child a life of toil and sorrow, renunciation and failure, lack of love and wealth, the fate of those who strive for something other than material pursuits. The mother allows the bee to touch her swelling belly as it promises the foetus of an ideal which will make it “see upon the mountain-tops burning gold” and gives the blessing: “*This shall be thy reward - that the ideal shall be real to thee*” (pp. 23-24; author’s emphasis). But this dream tale has an ironic twist in the end, and that is the foetus is also described to have a dream of its own: “But deep within her the antenatal thing that lay here had a dream” (p. 24). In its dream, the foetus sees nothing but a light, emblematic of life. And Schreiner makes the dream end on a tragic note that the foetus will never see the light of life, finding its ideal to be real in the world of death.

A significant feature of “A Dream of Wild Bees” is the synchronisation of the Ideal and the Real in the form of a dreaming foetus within its dreaming mother. The allegory can be read as a ventilation of the author’s past sorrow as a child, as well as her future anxiety as a mother; the absence of motherly love she felt in her own mother, and her own inability to become a mother. The child in question in the allegory is the ninth child, the position Schreiner herself held within the family. The first thing that the “antenatal thing” is given an independent destiny smacks of Schreiner’s own desire for a choice in her own destiny. Jay (2003) observes on the issue of maternity and maternal sacrifices that this dream highlights: “The repeated motif of renunciation, figured as a mother plucking the suckling child from her breast and giving it up to enable a greater good, in stories predating her own series of miscarriages, points to a deep preoccupation with the allied themes of motherhood renounced and the sacrifice of the infant as a route to a greater good” (p. xxiv).

The shortest of the stories in *Dreams*, “Life’s Gifts”, offers another dream within a dream of allegorical nature concerning a feminist issue. The unnamed narrator dreams of a woman who dreams of Life offering her two gifts – Love and Freedom – to choose one from them. The dreaming woman chooses Freedom, and the figure of Life becomes happy with her choice as the latter says, “If thou hadst said, ‘Love’, I would have given thee that thou didst ask for; and I would have gone from thee, and returned to thee no more. Now, the day will come when I shall return. In that day I shall bear both gifts in one hand” (Schreiner, *Dreams*, 2003, p. 29). This tale captures the contemporary dilemma of a nineteenth-century woman who desires to be independent, to define herself. Elaine Showalter (1991) read this story as an expression of “the bitterness and disillusionment of New Women with men who were not ready to join them in their evolutionary progress” (p. 57).

Schreiner’s *Dream Life and Real Life* (1893) is another dream allegory which “interpreted such problems as the search of truth, the meaning of life, the essence of real art, of human love, and . . . the women’s liberation struggle” (qtd. in Davidson & Filatova, 1993, p. 42). Very popular in her own day and a source of inspiration for the suffragettes, this story incorporates dream sequences with Biblical overtones. Although the Scriptural dreams served as a source for her literary inspiration and writing technique, Schreiner wanted one’s mind to be attached to concrete reality, life being an ideal amalgam of gentleness and toughness. The first story of this volume, “A Little African Story”, features two dreams which, contributing to the course of events of the plot, are significant from both social and psychological perspectives. Little Jannita,

a poor orphan child, is employed as a shepherdess. One day, at the time of herding, she feels depressed, gets tired and falls asleep to see a “beautiful dream” (Schreiner, *Dream Life and Real Life*, 2003, p. 49), which transforms the unpleasant events of her life into pleasant ones, the lacks of her real life getting fulfilled in her dream life: the *kraals* for the goats are transmuted into lilac trees from drab red stones, the goats jump over a blossoming lily branch instead of a barren stick. She also sees in her dream that her cruel mistress and other family members no longer torture her and are kind and polite enough to her to feed her well. She feels herself no longer an orphan, and when a goat kid licks her cheeks, she thinks her father kisses her. Watching some marks on the back of his daughter, he takes her away to Denmark. But immediately after her beautiful dream life, Jannita is taken back to her sordid real life when she finds a goat kid missing from the flock. Extremely frightened, she takes the flock back to the farm, where a Hotentot man, Dirk, who stole the goat and killed it for meat, informs her mistress about the missing goat, and Jannita is deprived of food as a punishment and is whipped badly. Hungry and weary, Jannita looks up at the moon and sees a spring-duck reach the cottage and return to the unknown free. Jannita also sets herself free and runs down the riverbank to build a hideaway there and sleep.

The next day, Jannita had her second dream, lying asleep in a cave amidst the rocks beside the river. She dreams that she is again with her father in a beautiful place with crowns of asparagus on their heads. They walk together hand in hand, when the passersby smile at her and kiss her and bestow their blessings on her with flowers and food. While dreaming, a darker reality hangs upon her. She comes to hear the plotting of burning her master’s cottage by three robbers, one of them being Dirk. She hurries back to the cottage to warn the master of the Boer family with her cry, “Master, master, wake!” (p. 55) She somehow manages to warn the Boer family, but gets attacked by the robbers and killed. The next day, she is buried under her beautiful shelter amidst nature, and the moon shines over it at night.

The two dreams that Jannita sees in the story carry various implications. If, on the one hand, her dreams are creative in the sense that they help Jannita to cope with her wretched existence, they are also destructive as they become responsible for her death. Had she not dreamed, she might have been able to spot the robbers much earlier, warn the Boers in time, and save her own life. In this light, dreaming is fatal, at least for Jannita. Yet this dreaming helps Jannita to endure the bleak and inhospitable circumstances that she was in by getting her suppressed wishes expressed through dreams. The Freudian perspective of dreams as wish fulfilment is appropriately expressed in this story.⁴ The contemporary Victorian theory of association in relation to dreams is also carried out when the goat-kid’s licking the cheek of Jannita makes her dream that it is the kiss of her father. Though Jannita’s dreams indirectly lead her to be killed, her dreams provide her, as to many other oppressed people, with means of survival.

The story implies the idea of self-sacrifice in order to save other lives. Jannita appears to be a Christ-figure whose self-immolation suggests that women, irrespective of ethnic and racial backgrounds, can bring about the regeneration of the entire human race. Ann Heilmann (1999) has opined that “with her central Christian metaphor of self-sacrifice, Schreiner tapped into the feminist unconscious of the time” (“Dreams in Black and White”, pp. 181-2). Heilmann (2003) also observes in the “Preface” to *Dreams, visions and Realities* that Schreiner’s *Dream Life and Real Life* suggests that “feminists sometimes combined their attack on patriarchy with a reclamation

of the concept of self-sacrifice in order to sanctify women (in Schreiner's story, black or mixed-race women) as a spiritually redemptive and morally regenerative force in society" (p. viii). Jannita's dreams also heighten the perception of the readers about the cruelty and sordidness of her actual condition by juxtaposing her sufferings with the creation of alternative, fantastic worlds of dreams. The fact that it is only Jannita's father who appears in her dreams, and not her mother, who is not even mentioned anywhere in the story, reflects the contemporary Victorian social structure and the gender acculturation of Jannita, and also possibly of the young Schreiner. Jay (2003) makes a pertinent remark about the role of the self-determining female protagonists in Schreiner's allegories:

The woman's self-sacrificial role is strongly reminiscent of the mid-Victorian understanding of woman's place in the theology of atonement, that Schreiner would have been taught as a child, and the accompanying trope of self-mutilation owes much to the Christian imagery of the self-wounding pelican mother, so beloved of Renaissance painters of the crucifixion (p. xxii).

Thus, Schreiner has also used dreams in her *fin-de-siècle* allegorical works in the 90's as Broughton had done in her sensation stories in the 70's of the nineteenth century. Such a preference for the non-realist genres was quite common with the women writers of the *fin de siècle*, and their investment in dreams and visions and allegories was a process to intervene into the particular historical and political moments. The prophetic messages and the desire for an imagined future, manifested through dreams and visions, make a way for the women to search for hopes and solutions that the immediate political or social circumstances could not offer to them. Jay (2003) comments, "Non-realist genres can be variously interpreted as, at worst, escapist substitutes for political engagement and, at best, models for future empowerment, offering a critical vantage-point external to the narratives of patriarchy" (p. xx). Schreiner's allegorical dreams address both the extremes of this interpretative approach as they, on the one hand, strive to escape the binary divide between ideal and real, and reinstall the same dualism on the other. Taking into consideration the popularity of dreams in the nineteenth century, especially among the women writers, Schreiner used them as vehicles in her allegories to germinate in the readers the passion, idealism, and optimism required for the desired change in society, especially to move beyond the social restraints cast on women. Schreiner has even included the word "dream" in the titles of her allegories, speaking for women, as she was aware, like Broughton, of the popularity of dream-tales among the women readers of her time.

Like Rhoda Broughton, Schreiner also employs the dream motif as a tool to represent the plight of women, to empower and liberate them from masculine bondage. But unlike Broughton, Schreiner has employed dreams from myriad perspectives. Whereas Broughton has favoured the prophetic and popular interpretations of dreams in her horror stories, Schreiner has taken into serious consideration the Biblical or visionary or Romantic views as well as the existing philosophical and even psychological explanations of dreams, with an inclination towards the latter. Her treatment differs from Broughton's as she has come out of the conventional superstitious representations of dreams by discarding dreams' divine or premonitory angles. Instead, she has adopted the rising scientific studies of dreams as something coming out of one's unconscious or subconscious self. Schreiner equated the process of her own dreaming with that of her writing, both coming out of her unconscious self through dream-

flashes, thereby transgressing the boundaries between conscious and unconscious or rational and non-rational phenomena.

Schreiner had a deep interest in the unconscious, especially in the erotic content of it, which she regarded as the source of artistic imagination and intellectual fervour. She was well aware of the contemporary studies of the unconscious by a group of scientists and philosophers who paved the way for modern psychology and psychoanalysis.⁵ Schreiner's friendship with J. A. Symonds and Arthur Symons, who were members of the Society for Psychical Research, founded in 1882, made her further interested in the study of the unconscious. Dreams, in this process, freed her writings from following the traditional, linear realism, and allowed her to break free from the conventional sense of time and space, merging past, present, and future together. Dreams served as a means for Schreiner to bridge the gaps between ideal and actual realities, between material and spiritual perceptions. The dream images that Schreiner used served as a platform for expressing her worlds of social, moral, and political ideals with which to transcend the boundaries and divisions of race, class, and gender, offering to transform not only her but others' perceptions about their mundane lives.

But Schreiner was not content with the physiological or psychological explanations of her dreams or unconscious flashes only. Despite her reverence for such theories, she considered the unconscious in semi-spiritual or supernatural terms: "a force works in us such as works in nature, and if we follow that we must be right," as Symons reports (qtd. in Cronwright-Schreiner, *The Life*, 1924, p. 31). She viewed the creative unconscious as a microcosmic representation of the cosmic creative impulse on the individual level. Following the Romantic trend, she considers the creative flashes as both individual and universal. Despite her dilemma between the naturalist and the transcendentalist perceptions of the unconscious, she discarded dreams as either divine or premonitory though she imbibed the Romantic view that dreams are revealing of some higher truth: "[H]er belief in a form of collective unconscious, as well as her mystic illuminations of the fusion of individual soul and cosmic truths, inclined her toward a more romantic outlook on unconscious creativity. When, in her allegories, she imagined a synthesis of natural and transcendental reality, she heard, as did Keats and Shelley, the music of the spheres" (Berkman, 1989, p. 202). Jay (2003) comments in this regard, "Schreiner's fondness for the dream form and the allegory -- it is not clear to what extent she distinguished between the two -- has been variously attributed to a Romantic strain acquired from Gottlob, to the influence of Dante, and of Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, the last, at least, forming staple reading in most nineteenth-century Protestant households" (p. xviii). Schreiner believed that the artist's ability to dream something unknown and transcendental to his lived experiences comes out of "the accumulated life of his race, of the millions of human creatures who have been his ancestors" to which the artist adds his personal and unique thoughts, intrinsically connected with the macrocosmic human experiences, to present a better future (Cronwright-Schreiner, *The Life*, 1924, p. 26).

But her representations of dreams do not strictly follow the scientific discourses of dreams. She suggests the dreams come from the unconscious self, which she considers to be something semi-spiritual or supernatural. She presents dreams neither from a core religious point of view, like Broughton, nor from a purely psychological angle. Her presentation is somewhere between these two perspectives. She does deal with religious or moral issues through her dream narratives, but she treats them more in a modern sense than in the conventional form. Schreiner's dream visions not only criticise the empire, capitalism, and patriarchy, but they are

also the reflections of her own desires and wishes. The dreams of various characters of her allegories have shown how they are mere literary representations of Schreiner's own personal concerns and hopes. The creation of dream sequences, therefore, was therapeutic, a cure, making Schreiner able to cope with her anxieties and sublimate her desires in envisaging utopian worlds.

But, again, unlike Broughton, Schreiner has not restricted this cure specifically for women from social and cultural boundaries. Rather, her allegorical dream sequences had a more benevolent and social purpose to serve as they enable Schreiner to transmute her repressed desires into envisioning a utopian world and the betterment of society. She sees dreaming not as a means for escaping the societal realities but as a medium to reconstruct the here and the now, "to carry the dreams and ideals we have formed out into the world, and incarnate them quietly and simply day by day in action" (Rive, 1988, p. 110). The popularity of her allegorical writings, embodying the most varied functions of her dreams, over her other polemical writings or social and political essays, attests to her choice of the genre and a deft use of literary dreams responding to the wider acceptance of this form of writing around that time. The use of multiple forms of dreams, encompassing traditional and contemporary, religious and scientific, literary and social aspects, reflects Schreiner's awareness of the development of dream studies and the popularity of the form, complementing each other in the process.

Notes

¹This frequency of her dreams was impacted by the process of regular self-medication that she applied for herself with patent medicines to remedy her loneliness, depression, chronic illness of asthma and repression of sexual urges at her London lodgings. "These remedies," Jay (2003) observes, "which often contained laudanum, together with the strychnine recommended by doctors and the potassium bromide that she believed to be useful in curbing sexual urges, must have formed a powerful and unpredictable medical cocktail, contributing to the bouts of sleeplessness and the lurid dreams and nightmares . . ." (p. xi).

²Burdett (2001) observes, "In 1885 she began to attend a discussion group called the Men and Women's Club, and formed an intense intellectual relationship with its founder, Karl Pearson. During this period she began seriously to research and plan a non-fictional 'scientific' study of the position of women. By the end of 1886, however, her personal life was in crisis. Her physician, Bryan Donkin had proposed to her; he believed her refusal of him was a consequence of the fact she was in love with Pearson. Pearson himself believed this too, although Schreiner vociferously denied that the attraction was sexual" (p. 10).

³Schreiner's sex-book came out of her discussions with Pearson and as a reaction to his article "Socialism and Sex" in his book *The Ethic of Freethought: A Selection of Essays and Lectures* (1888). Burdett (2001) writes regarding this: "For, as she told Havelock Ellis in 1887, it was Pearson for whom she was writing her 'sex work'. In doing so, she conforms to Pearsonian injunctions (most obviously about the importance of society over the individual), but offers a radically different outcome for women" (p. 62).

⁴Freud (2010) characterised and defined dreams as a reflection of past memory and as a medium of fulfilment of repressed wishes:

And the value of dreams for giving us knowledge of the future? There is of course no question of that. . . . It would be truer to say instead that they give us knowledge of the past. For dreams are derived from the past in every sense. Nevertheless the ancient belief that dreams foretell the future is not wholly devoid of truth. By picturing our wishes as fulfilled, dreams are after all

leading us into the future. But this future, which the dreamer pictures as the present, has been moulded by his indestructible wish into a perfect likeness of the past (p. 615).

⁵Berkman (1989) deliberates on the source of Schreiner's awareness about the unconscious:

To be sure, Schreiner's interest in the physiology of unconscious processes and their relation to artistic imagination was hardly unique in her time. A cluster of Victorian scientists and philosophers, intrigued by the unconscious, foreshadowed the development of modern psychology and psychoanalysis. In 1872 Frances Power Cobbe had written about dreams in terms akin to Schreiner's. Cobbe's essay "Dreams and Illustration of Unconscious Cerebration," published in *Darwinism in Morals and Other Essays* (1883), was perhaps the source of Schreiner's term "unconscious cerebration." Cobbe cited the research of other investigators of the unconscious, most notably Dr. W. B. Carpenter, whom she credited with first coining "unconscious cerebration" in a lecture to the meeting of the Royal Institution on March 1, 1868, and with whose writing Schreiner was also familiar (p. 200).

Schreiner almost celebrates this new aspect of her knowledge in her letter to Havelock Ellis, a researcher of human psychology and the unconscious, on June 12, 1890. She bursts out, "It ["conscious consciousness"] is new and strange evidence of that consciousness which I am sure exists in the brain, at least in mine. I am sure that these marvelous (sic) flashes, as when in *one instant* the whole of my *Prelude* flashed on me as I was sitting and writing things about Bushmen's heads, are not really a flash of revelation, but the result of absolutely unconscious cerebration that had been going on in my brain" (qtd. in Cronwright-Schreiner, *The Letters*, 1924, p. 189).

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**'Life is feelings, life is love, life is pain too':
A Progressive Reimagination of Lyrical Modernity
in the Select Non-Film Works of Sahir Ludhianvi**

Soumyadip Ghosh, PhD

Assistant Professor

Department of English,

North Bengal St. Xavier's College, West Bengal, India.

Email: sdg92.slg@gmail.com

Abstract

Starting in the mid-1930s in India and essentially marked by its propensity to rebel against different agents of oppression, the Progressive Writers' Movement produced writings that were simultaneously humane and disdainful depending on the context. Influenced by Marxism, the literature offered by the movement was, thus, an interweaving of the despair of the oppressed and a critique of the oppressor(s). The movement found its strongest literary manifestation in poetry, and hence, Sahir Ludhianvi, an eminent practitioner of Progressive verses, appears as a voice that intensely presents the void of freedom and the vainness of partition in India. Besides expressing the art of protest, Sahir's lyrics are also an ardent romantic expression of anguish, resignation, and contempt. Sahir's poems are, therefore, a direct commentary on the bitterness of human relationships and an emptiness that pervades the relationships. Sahir presents the disturbed narration of modernity with a voice that is concurrently passionate and penetrative. Hence, the present paper is an attempt to explore the intrinsic ideals of Sahir's poems that remain a proclamation of the Progressive ideology and lyrical modernity.



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Abhi na jaao chhod kar ke dil abhi bhara nabin...

(Please do not leave now; my heart is not full yet... my trans.), Sahir Ludhianvi, *Hum Dono* (1961).

Introduction

The Progressive Writers' Movement, an insurgent development that pronounced its emergence with the publication of the controversial *Angaree* (Embers) (1932), a collection of short stories, sought to overturn the contemporary dominant discourses that, as the members of the movement believed, produced a pervasive despair among humanity in general due to their oppressive and hegemonic standards. The movement, led by Sajjad Zaheer, attempted to render expression to the transformations taking place in the then Indian life, while its chief objective was to rescue Indian literature, which, with its escapist propensity, was suffering from "a rigid formalism and a banal and perverse ideology" (as cited in Mir and Mir, 2006, p. 5). In its first manifesto of 1936 published in *Left Review*, the movement expressed its objective, in which the major drift was to change the aesthetics of existing Indian literature: "We believe that the new literature of India must deal with the basic problems of our existence today-the problems of hunger and poverty, social backwardness and political subjugation..." (p. 5) and Munshi Premchand, the writer of the Hindi literature, believed that "any more sleep can only be a precursor of death" (Zaheer, 2006, p. 65). The tone of the manifesto remained deeply modernist and anti-fascist while the movement found its best manifestation in the writings of the Progressive Writers' Association (PWA), an offshoot of the movement. Using simple language and quotidian subject matters, the writers of the PWA redefined art as a social praxis that produced a body of literature that was based on anti-imperialism, social realism, and dialectic materialism. Although the PWA had many representative literary artists across languages, its profound incarnation might be seen in the Urdu poetry that had already witnessed varied epistemic shifts in its own history. Therefore, the partisanship of poets such as Sibte Hasan, Ali Sardar Jafri, Israr-ul-Haq Majaz, and Faiz Ahmed Faiz, to name a few, actually set the stage for the PWA to deal with issues, including anticolonial struggle, destitution and trauma due to the Second World War and partition, the Telengana mutiny, and the failure of the formation of a new nation. The PWA, thus, turned out to be the "strongest and proximate shaping force to the extent that it defined the parameters of the broad social agenda and cultural consensus among the generality of Urdu writers" (Ahmed, 1993, p. 28). Within this profuse tapestry, the emergence of Abdul Hayee, popularly known as Sahir Ludhianvi (1921-1980), marks a significant moment in the development of Urdu poetry. Estimating Sahir's contribution, Rakhshanda Jalil remarks, "Sahir's poetry has proved to be the most popular, longer lasting, and with greater recall-value than his comrades'; it is still sung, broadcast, and remembered by more Indians than any of the other Urdu heavy-weights" (Jalil, 2014, p. 297).

Although heavily influenced by the works of Muhammad Iqbal, Firaq Gorakhpuri, Faiz Ahmed Faiz, and Majaz Lakhnavi, Sahir's initial poetry never engaged with the staunch Progressive ideals, but it was more indicative of an anguish of unrequited romance, leading to despondency, despair, and disillusionment. Akshay Manwani remarked, "Poetry became a matter of cathartic release for him" (Manwani, 2013, p. 15). Although the initial poetry of Sahir might smack of the linguistic dexterity of Faiz and Majaz, Sahir could not remain blind to the pressing issues of the time, and his scruples, woven by the vulnerable human conditions, in fact, led him to come up with a firebrand of poetry, which was distinctive and bore the strong testimony of

the declared Progressive agenda. Carrying a similar thought to B. R. Chopra, who found that contemporary film producers “were wasting their time with comedies and mythologies, dancing and songs, thus avoiding dealing with any serious social issues” (Dwyer, 2002, p. 29), the fleeting romantic temperament in Sahir’s poems was eventually replaced by a bold and caustic voice, which questioned and critiqued the society, nation-state, and capitalism, expressing an alternative worldview he envisaged through his Marxist leanings. The plight of the plebeians stimulated the humanist Sahir to be a voice for his people to withstand the tenacity that brought despair. The vision of a utopian state through communism remained a recurrent motif in Sahir as well as in other poets belonging to the Progressive Writers’ Association. In one of his poems, Sahir openly expressed his fascination for the ideology when he wrote, “Those factories in which this unjust government takes pride / From there shall arise the soldiers of tomorrow / Red flags sprout across the milieu” (as cited in Manwani, 2013, p. 52), but Sahir was never rigid about the vortex of communism and literature of the Progressive, as he proclaimed, “I do not believe that without being a communist it is not possible to produce Progressive literature. If any poet details today’s circumstances with honesty, there is nothing that can stop him from writing Progressive literature” (Manwani, 2013, p. 52). Therefore, beginning with *Talkhiyaan* (Bitterness) in 1944, a fusion of romantic, insurgent, and emotional poems narrated in colloquial language, Sahir’s poetry, especially his nazms, scathingly critiqued any form of venal structures, including capitalism, bourgeois nationalism, mercenary imperialism, political persecution, religious imposture, and even enraptured paramours that remained inimical to humanity in general. Unlike preceding or contemporary lyrics, many of Sahir’s nazms, which were “modern revolutionary poetry in Urdu” (Zaheer, 1956/2006, p. 251), present love not as a romantic motif but articulate its pitfalls that galvanised his readers but his unrestrained poetic voice always showed different emotions involved in a romantic relationship, some of which were unmistakably his own. Ali Sardar Jafri points out, “Sahir deploys a lover’s arrogance, egotism, and self-indulgence that was last seen in Ghalib’s poetry” (as cited in Deol, 2019, p. xxviii).

Romanticism and Collective Despair

The romantic temperament of traditional Urdu lyrics, especially as may be found in Ghazals, undergoes a radical change in Sahir’s poetic oeuvre, in which the voice of the lovelorn poet-speaker is not confined only to the limits of subjective experiences. In all his poems, the voice of the speaker, representing Sahir’s own temperament, succinctly politicises and thereby transforms the romantic agony and existential despair into a poetic labyrinth where personal anguish and collective social maladies are most realistically juxtaposed. As a result, many of his poems become a regenerative space of personal despondency, abrasion of irrevocable loss, precarity caused by historical materialism, and deflection of subjective anguish to a rebellious collective consciousness. The debasement of the poet-speaker into an abyss of ontological despondency promulgates Sahir to postulate that the romantic desire must be objectively negotiated and, if needed, be discarded to survive against the irreducible aspects of life. His nazm, beginning with “The struggle and strains of life...,” presents the collapse of the speaker into a vast existential despair that further portrays how the volitional anguish changes him into a stoic nihilist, who says, “From today, I will complain against none” (Salil, 2016, p. 31). Although Sahir writes that the speaker’s struggle will move him towards self-reliance, the remnant of romance, albeit morbid, makes the speaker succumb to a tragic attachment, wherein the speaker’s derelicted state will be endorsed by the beloved’s glance: “If ever we meet again ... I will like to know my

condition from your looks askance” (p. 31). This crisis is also evident in “Escapist,” which is Sahir’s self-loathing recount of a deflating story filled with imagination and futile aspirations. The poem’s seeming romantic trope presented through the building of “castles in the air” (p. 97) at once becomes the poet’s anguished moaning as he says, “And a nameless misery is what I got / By way of reward for my efforts and hope” (p. 97). The contemptuous voice of Sahir, expressed with perturbing questions, can be heard when he describes his beloved’s eyes as smashed, proclaiming, “Let me say that I never loved her” (p. 99). While the title of the poem refers to the poet’s wish to avoid the failed past and the lady in question remains his aggrieved subject, Sahir’s uncompromised character is distinctive when he says, “Let me say that I can live jolly well without her / I may be a failure in love but not a failure in life really” (p. 99). Sahir’s “Sometime,” later adopted in Yash Chopra’s *Kabhi Kabhi* (Sometime) (1976), is a contemplation on life without the burden of the reality of romance. The initial ardent language, presented in phrases such as “cool shade of your tresses” (p. 51) and “realms of your beauty” (p. 51), gradually becomes a melancholic articulation of a nihilistic life created by the absence of the beloved: “My life is passing through empty spaces / And in these spaces one day I will sink” (p. 55). In his poetry, Sahir also tries to seek relief from an overarching emptiness that surrounds him. “I feel” articulates his attempt to find emotional liberation by completely rejecting the notion of longing. Dealing with the paradoxical nature of love, which is both a source of happiness and a futile fixation, Sahir repulsively presents love with its crude imperatives. However, Sahir’s arduous self-mastery can also be contrasted with his escapist tenacity for seeking a momentary solace from the ravages of time “in the goblet and the bottle” (p. 33).

Personal Defeatism and Transient Intimacy

With his staunch Progressive ideology, Sahir also presents the issue of the destructive impact of choral rift and social suppression that turns human relationships not just into a site of fleeting grief but also a prolonged moment of predestined catastrophe. His nazm “Shadows,” an invocation to romantic idealisation written during the Suez Canal Crisis in 1956, offers a carnal engagement with an image of celestial light: “That milky spread over the bosom of the night so young” (Salil, 2016, p. 35), personifies trees as an onlooker of the lovers’ affair, depicts romantic love as sensitive and precious, describes the coyness of the beloved as her magnetic attractive power, and portrays the culmination of the relationship through a romantic yielding. However, the penetrating limitation shown in the refrain, “The shadows of imagination well up” (p. 39), strips all such passion and defines everything as a depressive illusion contrived by scopophobia, “Fearful of the sounds of your own footsteps” (p. 39). This psychological impediment finds another manifestation in a depressing poem, “Defeat,” where the speaker, emotionally ruined by separation, refutes any regretful return as he says, “I have in every manner ruined my heart” (p. 45). Pervaded by despair, the speaker resists any revived love or “repentant beauty” (p. 47). Carrying off the flair its title offers, the monologue shows the lover’s resistance as a careful strategy to preserve his dilapidated self from being further emotionally exploited anymore: “Now your cheeks and silken tresses / Cannot lift my sad, sad heart” (p. 47). The personal despair resulting from a forbidden romantic relationship constructs the thrust of the nazm, “Somebody else’s wealth.” For the speaker, their bonding has now become an agonised tale, making his survival an insufferable impediment, while his beloved is compared to a flower, which is “meant to deck somebody else’s apparel” (p. 81). The contrapuntal description of the beloved by the speaker as a disloyal yet an epitome of abnegation, her presence as a dream, the speaker’s

inability to decide about the continuation of their relationship, the trace of the residual passion in comparing her cheeks with flowers, and the speaker's innate desire to take her in his arms on a chilled night suddenly change the mood of Sahir, who apprehends the transformation of the reality into a fantasy. Like a modernist poet, Sahir is here uncertain about the future of their bonding and skeptical about his own destiny: "... the lovely message from your lovely eyes / Should become a messenger of my death" (p. 81). The romantic temperament, however, does not diminish as he finally surrenders his fate to his beloved, being unaware of whether his "today will see its tomorrow or not" (p. 81). Sahir's "Your voice," ringing with Pablo Neruda's romantic sonnets, presents the extenuating power of the beloved's voice. The memory of her voice breaks the speaker's loneliness, but the poem ends on a note of defiance. Her voice, cosmically as well as romantically idealised, appears to the speaker "like a spring gushing out of a rock" (p. 69) and drives out his "unbearable loneliness" (p. 71). The idealisation of the beloved is manifested when Sahir calls her voice 'intoxicating' (p. 71) with "simple silent eyes," "winsome gait," and "delicate physical frame" (p. 73). The longing for an imaginative intimacy is distinctive: "Your breath kissed my body as it passed" (p. 73). However, the imagination is transitory, as the compulsive reality compels Sahir to assert, "I will not look forward to meeting you" (p. 73) and with his confidence in his enduring artistic capability, he concludes with a wistful longing: "And my soul which is ever yearning for you / Will become a song on your lips" (p. 73). If the motif of ephemerality is shown in the imagination in "Your voice," it finds a different silhouette in "A Poet of the Moment," where Sahir remorselessly admits, "I too am a story of the moment" (Deol, 2019, p. 29), accepting that the emergence of new poetry, new wave, and new dreams is ineluctable. Therefore, he remains obliged to the beloved for listening to him in that particular moment. Sahir does not swither to show the reality, however bitter it is, and this finds an outlet in "A Beautiful Turn," which describes an onerous moment of transformation from lovers to strangers because Sahir believes, "If a relationship becomes a burden, / it is better to break it" (p. 43).

Progressive Consciousness

Having a remarkable command over language and different forms of Urdu poetics, such as ghazal and nazm, Sahir Ludhianvi, a trained Urdu poet, also grasps Hindi with equal persistence for his Bollywood lyrics. Javed Akhtar contends, "As an Urdu poet, Sahir had developed such a fine sense of phonetics that when he wrote in Hindi, he applied the same sensitivity" (Kabir, 1999, p. 128). Yet the same Sahir purposefully disrupts the romantic spectrum in many of his poems to include different contemporary social concerns. These concerns, ranging from hierarchy to historical materialism, strengthen his poetic corpus and offer him the space to express the art of protest, a strong Progressive agenda. This is perfectly evident in his poem "Madam," which is an outlet of Sahir's anguish over class humiliation and his abomination of the corrosive impact of poverty on human dignity. As an interlocutor, Sahir mostly presents different situations, ranging from failed love to inexorable critique of bourgeoisie culture, in his poetry, and Hafeez Ludhianvi comments that Sahir's poems "are written in response to some personal tragedy or romantic liaison" (as cited in Deol, 2019, p. 134). In this context, it must be noted that Sahir never had dreamy childhood days because of the depraved nature of his father, Chaudhri Fazi Mohammed, and due to this, Sahir was brought up single-handedly by his mother, Sardar Begum, with whom Sahir had shared perhaps his most precious relationship. Khushwant Singh describes, "Sahir developed a strong mother-fixation and loathing for his father: the

relationship was an example of the Greek Oedipus complex, which made him incapable of consummating the few love affairs he had in the short life of 59 years” (Singh, 2004, para. 5). Nevertheless, Sahir had developed a few fleeting romantic relationships and he possibly had shared the most profound and intimate liaison with the Punjabi poet, Amrita Pritam. A forever bachelor that he was, the relationship between Sahir and Amrita was mostly defined by silence, as after her divorce from her husband, Pritam Singh, Amrita started living with Imroz. Recounting Amrita’s feelings for Sahir, Uma Trilok says, “... there was one kind of love like that of the sky, and there was another, which was like a roof over one’s head. Sahir Ludhianvi was ‘like the sky’ for her” (Trilok, 2006, p. 18). In fact, Sahir’s “Madam” had been “triggered by a casual remark by Amrita Pritam about the shabbiness of Sahir’s friends in Lahore” (Deol, 2019, p. 84). The way the poem’s speaker loathes the beloved’s imputation of him for being discourteous and the propelling of dialectical materialism through the determination of consciousness by the class truly places Sahir in the parlance of Progressive literature. The following lines not only show Sahir’s communist leanings but also present him more as a voice for humanity: “Poverty indeed wipes out all delicate feelings / And a hungry person no manners knows” (Salil, 2016, p. 41).

Romance and Progressive Ethos

The artistic genius of Sahir Ludhianvi also lies in his unique treatment of romance that is not always about the sheer aestheticisation of the beloved as usually seen in the Urdu tradition of ghazals and nazms. Instead, Sahir never hesitates to address its pitfalls if those are detrimental to humanity at large. For instance, in “Masterpiece,” he simply requests the painter to deflate the overdose of glamour and beauty of the beloved lying in a painting because he believes that the portrait must reflect the reality of suffering, too. His instructions, “Make the juicy lips dry and withered” (Salil, 2016, p. 49) and “Make the swelling breasts sinking low” (p. 49), concurrently show his desire to make art an expression of reality and to lampoon a materialist woman who would love a possession like car over the poet. While the treatment of the beloved with utter approbation remains a hallmark of traditional Urdu poetry, Sahir swerves from it, insistently imploring the beloved: “If you have the courage, pick up the flag of rebellion. / Otherwise, get married to whoever your parents / choose for you” (Deol, 2019, p. 31). Sahir also occasionally seems to be critical of social institutions like marriage. His anguish pervades the nazm, “Setting up home,” in which he presents marriage as a metaphor of betrayal: “Love weeps and culture smiles ... This marriage will destroy a house, my brother dear / So I cannot congratulate...” (Salil, 2016, p. 85). Another Progressive quality of Sahir can also be noticed when he realises that the righteousness of emotional space is compromised by the economic constraint. He dolefully says, “The songs of love that I wrote for you / Today I have brought them for sale in the marketplace” (p. 87). His aversion towards capitalism is easily seen when he admits that, compelled by impoverishment, he transforms his poems into mere products where his personal words for the beloved will be reserved for others. The humanist image of Sahir emerges when he rejects the personal romantic failure for the sake of the collective suffering of the world: “See the multitudes dying under tyranny / Let me not hear the litany of your defeated desires” (p. 63). Sahir’s humanist impulse can also be found in his anti-war poems, where war is treated as the destroyer of social fabric, shatterer of romantic dreams, and inimical to human dignity as it peddles the lovers’ intimacy, a mother’s affection, and a sister’s youth. His “O Civil Humans,” written against the backdrop of the Tashkent treaty of 1970, looks at war as the generator of fire,

blood, hunger, and poverty. Unlike Faiz's rueful admonition, Sahir's critique of the nation is much contemptuous, as evident in "26th January": "If the wealth of the nation has increased, why this growing poverty?" (Mir and Mir, 2006, p. 163).

Critiquing Disillusionment

Sahir's preference to express a diatribe of the social exploitations over a self-indulgent lamentation of romance indeed underscores his fidelity to social realism, which has been a hallmark of Progressive literature. His pangs of agony are also presented in "On the same crossroads," which initially states that the speaker has forsaken entering the mansions, symbols of material wealth, and writing romantic songs as his failed love makes him disconcerted. Sahir's artistic brilliance cannot be overlooked when he connects "the crossroads of riches and poverty" (p. 103) with the beloved's repeated unfaithfulness in a capitalist setting. The image of crossroads, precisely a mentalscape, presents romance as an ill-fated victim. Moreover, the beloved's striking a balance with insatiability also makes the poet despair in "A picture of colours," where her passionate love is finally incarcerated, and her "delicate wings" (p. 105) are laden with wealth. The speaker, thus, becomes acrid when he realises that the beloved's covetousness overshadows her conscience and thereby her smile becomes feigned, devoid of any passion. Sahir's portrayal of romance never undermines the dignity of his speaker. While the speaker's indulgence in alcohol is an attempt to set aside the trauma he experiences in love, the tribulation in love has completely disillusioned him, eradicating any further desire: "My tragedy in love was so heartbreaking / That after that, I had no desire for anything" (p. 149). The self-reflective character of the speaker can also be seen in "An Incident," where he deserts the past to respond to the future, which "with its moving hands" (Deol, 2016, p. 59) calls him endlessly. Some of Sahir's poems are also an expression of an acute sense of vulnerability and melancholia that even repudiates the speaker's capacity to love. Feeling a perennial abandonment, the speaker in "Helplessness" expresses his inability to smile or sing a song anymore. Written in a mode of confessional poetry, the poem's speaker, torn between a romantic desire and its immediate abnegation, finds his defeated predicament "in the darkness of despair" (Salil, 2019, p. 113). Hence, the poem's speaker, like Sahir, remains open to "a universal, inevitable, enduring aspect of the human condition that must be at the heart of our concept of social and state responsibility" (Fineman, 2008, p. 9).

Autobiographical Strain and Collective Vulnerability

It can be said that Sahir's poems bear an autobiographical stamp, as the moments faced by the poet-speaker are the moments Sahir faced in his real life. For instance, the speaker in "Before the suicide," akin to his creator, thinks about suicide as a possible escape from the harsh reality, "I will break away from daily death-in-life" (Salil, 2019, p. 119). The poem's underlying romantic note is a rumination on life and death that smacks of Pablo Neruda's enumeration of death coming to a moribund in "Nothing but Death": "Death arrives among all that sound ... / Nevertheless its steps can be heard / and its clothing makes a hushed sound, like a tree" (as cited in Hirsch, 1999, p. 37). However, Sahir's commitment to social realism never allows him to be carried away from his Progressive stance, and hence, a moment of personal romantic defeatism is straightway connected to a collective misery as he says, "Nobody knows when the fortunes of oppressed humanity will change" (Salil, 2016, p. 119). Ganesh Anantharaman notes, "Sahir's poetry was unvarnished, hitting you straight with its cynicism. He never believed in sublimating his emotions or in pleasing the powers that be ... He may have been cynical of politics, but Sahir

never lost faith in the collective power of people” (Anantharaman, 2008, p. 114). As an autobiographical poem, Sahir’s “Failure” represents the failure of his personal life, especially when he had to move to Lahore from Ludhiana. Engrossed in a web that leads him from one fiasco to another, Sahir lugubriously postulates, “I am a failure / and my effort to do anything good / is also a failure” (Deol 2019, p. 66). The note of fatalism and desolation also marks “On seeing somebody sad,” a narration of the journey of love from personal desire to steadfast suffering, where the speaker has to bear the beloved’s coldness. However, the speaker’s finding of paradoxical pleasure in this grief takes the poem to a different realm. Considering the beloved as his only hope, he accepts the separation with a promise to keep her in his imagination. The speaker’s assertion that he will remove happiness from his heart and that he cannot see her misery is again counterpoised by his empathy for the common people suffering in poverty and his awareness of capitalist despotism, a Progressive writer’s propensity already mastered by Faiz: “The iron into shape in the factories everywhere / Burying the joys of millions underneath its noise” (Salil, 2016, p. 179). Sahir’s aversion to bourgeois culture and majestic opulence is also evident in “My songs,” which defines Sahir’s idea of love as protest and not as embellished aesthetics. Although he is not belligerent to art, as he is a poet, he cannot compromise with the rapaciousness that brings human precarity, making Sahir assert: “I do not trust my own love too” (p. 151). This idea is further advanced with Sahir’s nazm, “I have said good-bye to love,” the title of which generates a profound stoicism and romantic exhaustion. Experiencing futile hopes and enduring torments caused by personal anguish stemming from romantic failure, the speaker embraces the suicide pill - a site of gnawing despondency. Sahir’s poetry also occasionally portrays a dimming note of dejection emanating from the impossibility of the arrival of love. The sombre setting of “Wait” that presents the “world wrapped in slumber” (p. 185) shows the fidgetiness of the speaker in asking the beloved to come to him before his “love is no longer young” (p. 185). The wretched longing shows that the appeal involves less vehemence and more an intimate moment of togetherness before life comes to an end: “Sleep at least tonight” (p. 187).

Conclusion

Unrestrained by the classical norms of Urdu poetry, Sahir’s poetry, especially his nazms, exhibits a clear juxtaposition of candid vocabulary and visionary ideals. His genius possibly lies in articulating a discerning idea in simple terms, such as in a nazm titled “My songs belong to you,” he says, “I don’t mind if people don’t consider me as an artist from today / Those who trade in poetry, do not accept me as a poet” (Salil, 2016, p. 183). However, what distinguishes Sahir as an ideal Progressive is “Taj Mahal,” which is not an ode to love but a poetic statement on oppressive social exploitation. Here, Sahir’s censure for the extravaganza of an emperor, who “...on the strength of his wealth and riches / Has made fun of the poor lovers like us” (p. 29) establishes his solicitude for the poor workers who were instrumental behind the architect but were never valued or perhaps strategically removed from having any recognition. With an emotional detachment, here the poet asserts the ubiquity of the primal emotion of love against the backdrop of the Taj Mahal, pronouncing social contradictions. Hence, he asks the beloved to meet somewhere else. Sahir Ludhianvi’s poems are, thus, a powerful critique of capitalism, decadent ideals of religion and artistry, elite nationalism, mercenary colonialism, and inebriated romance that gives us “reservoirs of capabilities, advantages, or coping mechanisms that cushion us when we are facing misfortunes, disaster and violence...” (Fineman, 2013, p. 22). He

deliberately chooses his poetry to be a manifesto that would be vehemently powerful, rebelliously scornful, and enormously humane. Sahir's poetry undoubtedly confirms that "poetic creation is one of the forms of ideological creation" (Bukharin, n.d., para. 5). The connection between song and poetry is well noted by Christopher Claudwell: "... poetry is characteristically song, and song is characteristically something which, because of its rhythm, is sung in unison, and is capable of being the expression of a collective emotion" (Claudwell, 1955, p. 68) and Sahir marks no exception in it, as his works, both poetic and lyrical, serve to be the mouthpiece of the social conscience, articulating firm protest against the ruthless social structures. His poetry, thus, remains "... a reminder of art in shaping the world around us" (Sani, 2024, p. 22).

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Tracing the History of Apartheid in the Select Novels of Nadine Gordimer

Ashish Awasthi

Research Scholar

Department of English,

C.M.P. College, University of Allahabad,

Prayagraj, India.

Email: ashish.bbhc@gmail.com

Ram Prakash Gupt, PhD

Assistant Professor

Department of English,

C.M.P. College, University of Allahabad,

Prayagraj, India.

Email: ramprakashgupt@gmail.com

Abstract

This study explores the history and evolution of apartheid in Nadine Gordimer's *Burger's Daughter* (1976) and *July's People* (1981). These novels were written against the backdrop of major political and historical events in South Africa. The writings of Gordimer portray the social, political, and cultural milieu of South Africa, where people from numerous communities reside. The plots of Gordimer's novels are mostly woven around the central theme of apartheid. As a white author of European origin, Nadine Gordimer portrayed the testimony of the subjugation and cruelty of Western colonizers against native South Africans. Gordimer was assertive against the inequalities of the apartheid regime in South Africa throughout her writings. In these two novels, Gordimer has demonstrated the atrocities of racial segregation against blacks and the lust for power in whites. This study examines the origins and gradual development of apartheid in South Africa, using the given facts and selected novels. The paper has investigated the calamities of liberal whites who supported the anti-apartheid movement.



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Gordimer is the representative of the people of her country and a supporter of humanity at large. In her writing, racism and poverty among African communities have been exposed. She feels that her birth of European descent has isolated her fatally and that the terrible violence against Black people is the only thing she can expose. With her deep understanding of South Africa, a writer like Gordimer can convey the country's reality and the black populace's actual suffering. It requires a lot of courage to portray the harsh reality of society in the writings of any writer. By all odds, she depicted the exploitation and discrimination in her writings. She decided to stay in her country, though the authoritarian government banned her novels. As a political activist, she worked for the equality and liberty of the Blacks and minority groups in South Africa. Gordimer has also faced resentment from a handful of black activists because she was a white African. In South Africa, history has been purposefully created to uphold white supremacy, and communication has contributed to the subjugation of people. White South African minorities held effective control of the country during the apartheid era.

The literary genius of Nadine Gordimer led her to the core of anti-apartheid activism, producing a body of fiction that brought her the greatest literary honour, the Nobel Prize, in 1991. It was just a coincidence that when she started writing, the Afrikaner-dominated National Party ascended into power and remained in power for almost 50 years. Gordimer, in a conversation, described herself as an instinctive writer because she began writing in her early childhood, when she knew nothing about politics or apartheid: "I write about people who happen to live under that system" (Boyers et al., 1984, p. 27). In one of her essays entitled "English-Language Literature and Politics of South Africa" she considers writers to be "the creative consciousness of the society in which they live" (Gordimer, 1976, p.142). A writer inherits so much of the raw material from the society to which he/she belongs. Gordimer believes that a writer should always be dutiful to his country and people. In her essay, "A Writer's Freedom," Gordimer says that the primary concern of a writer is always, "to write the truth as he sees it" (Gordimer, 1975, p. 47), and his central motif should be the "enlargement of the reader's apprehension of reality" (Gordimer, 1975, p. 47). From the completion of this responsibility, the writer proposes his "unique contribution to social changes" (Gordimer, 1975, p. 47).

Gordimer implies that a writer should always be vocal against the persecution of blacks in their writings. Every society has constraints and complications that a writer should address through his artistic creation. Sometimes a writer can create social conflict through his writing, but mostly it would be beneficial for social reconciliation. If there is a conflict while writing, the writer should extricate it by practising his primordial freedom as a writer. As Gordimer rightly mentions in "*A Writer's Freedom*", a writer should always have the "right to maintain and publish to the world a deep, intense, private view of the situation in which he finds his society" (Gordimer, 1975, p. 45). Gordimer's writings are a reaction to the historical circumstances of South Africa. Simultaneously, she preserves her determination that fiction should contain a sense of veracity. Most of Gordimer's writings are a sheer reflection of the socio-political situation under the apartheid regime in South Africa.

Although South Africa's apartheid officially started in 1948, its origins may be traced back to earlier racial policies and colonial practices. It was typified by a legal and social structure that guaranteed the white minority's supremacy over the black and non-white majority, severely restricting the black's rights and liberties. Early policies and practices created the foundation for

racial segregation. For example, land statutes prohibited land ownership based on race, while passing laws that restricted the movement of black Africans. Apartheid's origins can be found in the colonial era when Britishers and Dutch settlers established dominance over the area, resulting in racial hierarchy and land confiscation. When the National Party came into power in 1948, it formally imposed apartheid and passed legislation to reinforce racial segregation. In South Africa, police and military forces were employed by the apartheid government to quell opposition. This includes deploying forces against demonstrators, arresting leaders, and outlawing opposition groups. In fact, "apartheid had made it impossible to even speak of a South African culture or society without defining it in terms of racial discrimination" (Padhi & Dash, 2004, p. 6). The term 'apartheid' was not used until 1946. In 1948, elections were scheduled, and it was anticipated that General Jan Christian would be re-elected. In a campaign address on March 29, Dr. Daniel Francois Malan used the term 'apartheid' for the first time as a strategy of racial connection. His speech was,

The [Nationalist] party, therefore, undertakes to protect the white race against any policy, doctrine or attack which might undermine or threaten its continued existence...The party believes that a definite policy of separation (apartheid) between the White races and the non-White racial groups, and the application of the policy of separation also in the case of the non-White racial groups, is the only basis on which the character and the future of each race can be protected and safeguarded and in which each race can be guided so as to develop its own national character, aptitude and calling. (Tiryakian, 1960, pp. 685-686)

Therefore, Prime Minister Malan used the phrase 'apartheid', "as the policy to ensure the safety of the white race and Christian civilization" (Padhi and Dash, 2004, p. 216). Dr. Malan created the term 'apartheid' to get the support of white voters because he was anti-Black African. He made the white electorate fearful of Africans. In order to win the majority of votes and emerge victorious, the Nationalist Party consequently took a harsh stance against non-white people. Thus, apartheid was the reason the Nationalist Party won the 1948 election, which, according to Edward A. Tiryakian, was "fought over the Native question, and apartheid as a political slogan" (Tiryakian, 1960, p. 691). The apartheid system separated and subjugated non-white South Africans. As a result, the minority white population subjected the majority of black people, who made up 85% of the population overall, to the most heinous forms of subjugation.

The novel *Burger's Daughter* was written against the backdrop of the anti-apartheid revolution. Many historical events and people, such as the Soweto Uprising and Nelson Mandela, were directly or indirectly associated with the novels. The novel is set in South Africa between 1948, when the Afrikaner-dominated National Party came to power, and 1976, when the Soweto Uprising occurred. This novel was subsequently banned in South Africa in 1979, as Gordimer points out, the reason for the ban, "flagrantly crossed the line to illegality" (Bazin & Seymour, 1984, p. 142). Gordimer wrote this novel during the period when, in South Africa, the whites were incessantly exploiting blacks. The human rights violations in the country were at their peak. Law and the police were also completely opposed to civilian rule. In *Burger's Daughter*, Gordimer believes that apartheid is "the dirtiest social swindle the world has ever known" (Gordimer, 2000, p. 349). There was barbarity, anguish, and delinquency pervading the society, which could be sensed with the helplessness of Rosa's 'virtual' brother Bassie, who later changed his name to Zwelinzima, which in Afrikaans means 'suffering land'.

Through the character of Bassie, Gordimer portrayed the effect of the Black Consciousness Movement in South Africa. Bassie had become hostile toward the family that had sheltered him after he became an orphan. This was the influence of the Black Consciousness Movement, which instigated blacks against discrimination against blacks in the country. This movement awakens blacks to fight for respectable recognition and existence in society. As Bassie grew up, his anger deepened towards whites. He burst out into a meeting where people were praising the contribution of Rosa's father, Lionel Burger's martyrdom. He expressed his disappointment over the fact that his father, Isaac Vulindlela, was killed in the apartheid struggle, but he never got the recognition like white activists did. There were thousands of other activists like Bassie's fathers who deserved recognition and fought and died anonymously. He asserted, "whatever you whites touch, it's a takeover....even when we get free, they'll want us to remember to thank Lionel Burger" (Gordimer, 2000, p.329).

Many anti-apartheid movements were going on where both whites and blacks were equally active. However, some groups of black organizations were not in support of whites in the anti-apartheid movement. Few blacks considered that apartheid was only against the ease of blacks, so only blacks were allowed to protest and fight against it. These movements hurt a few white liberals who were in support of anti-apartheid struggles and the liberation of blacks. For Gordimer, the Black Consciousness Movement has provided a platform to express the grief and troubles of black people in South Africa. As Edward Powell said about Gordimer, she "sympathized with the movement's searing critique of liberal whites, who were accused of paternalism, complacency, and a lack of genuine commitment to pursuing meaningful change in South Africa" (Powell, 2017, p. 3).

Rosa believed that there was a mutual participation of all races in the freedom struggle of South Africa against apartheid rule. There were movements such as the Black African Movement and the Black Consciousness Movement, which were only for the support of blacks. But still, Rosa believed that brotherhood between blacks and whites couldn't be diminished. Gordimer, too, was concerned that the eradication of apartheid is not possible without the mutual participation of all the ethnic groups of South Africa. As Sharanya Ganguly asserted:

Sexuality and bodily union, resentment, conflicting ideologies, friendship, betrayal among the races all serve as a symbol for this combined struggle for the future of South Africa, where black and white individuals not only complement each other, they make the purpose of the Anti-Apartheid movement complete. (Ganguly, 2017, p. 215)

This novel has focused extensively on issues of African consciousness. This was the first novel, probably, which was not only limited to the detriments of blacks due to racism and apartheid, but also the issues of Whites and their issues have been justified by Gordimer.

The novel *July's People* was written and published in 1981, during the apartheid era in South Africa; Gordimer set the novel in post-apartheid times. The novel prophesies the inexorable decline of the white population in South Africa and the emergence of new social and political forces that would question the autonomous authority of whites. *July's People* received strong critical acclaim for its explicit depiction of the lives of black and white people in adverse circumstances. Through her depiction, Gordimer unearths some interesting dimensions of South African society. Though this novel was written at the peak of apartheid, it dealt with the imaginary issue of post-apartheid relations between whites and blacks. The novel predicts a

chaotic future for South Africa, in which blacks will be in a commanding position, unlike today, when whites dominate. The plot of the novel reveals that apartheid has been completely eradicated with the militia help of the neighboring countries, which led to the ultimate victory of the blacks of South Africa. As Gordimer pointed the tumultuous scenes in *July's People*:

It's a war. It's not like that, any more...the blacks have also got guns. Bombs (miming the throwing of a hand grenade). All kinds of things. Same as the white army, everything that kills. People have come back from Botswana and Zimbabwe, Zambia and Namibia, from Mozambique, with guns. (Gordimer, 2017, p. 142)

The novel retraces the tendency toward chaos in the country's political and social spirit. The title of the novel emphasizes the inconspicuous and sarcastic nature of relationships in the book. Stephen Clingman, one of the major critics of Gordimer in his book entitled *The Novels of Nadine Gordimer: History from the Inside*, noticed the prime attempt of Gordimer to consolidate the position of blacks in two of her most acclaimed novels, *Burger's Daughter* and *July's People*. As Clingman points out:

Whether there can be a role for whites in the context of Soweto and after, and what the practical implications of such a role might be. The two novels are in some ways very different; Rosa Burger, in *Burger's Daughter*, comes from an official and conspicuous political tradition; Maureen Smales, in *July's People*, is amongst the most ordinary of Gordimer's characters, politically considered. But the underlying themes of the two novels unite them, at the same time suggesting new developments in Nadine Gordimer's consciousness of history. (Clingman, 1999, pp.171-72)

Stephen Clingman sees *July's People* as "subjecting the features of white bourgeois culture in South Africa to a radical and penetrating analysis" (Clingman, 1999, p. 107). This scenario mentally alarmed whites about their future. Gordimer herself premediated the upcoming position of whites in South Africa, and she speculated that apartheid cannot remain in the country for long, as she laid out in her memoir *Telling Times*:

The white who has declared himself or herself for that future, who belongs to the white segment that was never at home in white supremacy does not know whether he will find his home at last. It is assumed, not only by racists, that this depends entirely on the willingness of the blacks to let him it. (Gordimer, 2011, p.382)

Displacement, apartheid, language barrier, race discrimination, gender inequality, and identity crisis are some significant issues that have been pointed out in the novel. The black revolution has given the freedom to blacks to normalise their lives with daily activities like working with the family, lack of privacy, and many more. The displacement of a white family from the comforts of the city to the destitution of July's village causes conflicts and psychic disruptions between whites and blacks. Novel answers to the various questions of natives who were dispossessed of their land and fought hard to prove their existence in their very own place.

From every angle, one thing is quite evident in Gordimer's novels: they are an honest documentation of the irresoluteness of both whites and blacks. In her fiction, the plight of liberal whites has been shown, of which Gordimer herself was a victim. Some blacks, like Basie from the novel *Burger's Daughter*, consider white liberals responsible for the exploitation of blacks. She has been critical of both mentalities. She has made clear why she supported the anti-apartheid movement as she says in *Conversations with Nadine Gordimer*, "my novels are anti-apartheid, not because of my personal abhorrence of apartheid, but because the society that is the very stuff of

my work reveals itself...if you write honestly about life in South Africa apartheid damns itself” (Bazin& Seymour, 1984, p. 83). Gordimer promises attention to the black community to affirm their human dignity in the present phase of human liberation. In her writings, one could easily find her trying to pave a possible alternative white role in the future through liberal humanistic responsibility. According to Gordimer, white South Africans need to embrace the ideals of the country’s dominant ethnic group to redefine their identity. They have to adapt to the philosophy, language, and values of the place they have designated as their native land. She is opposed to telling Black people how to fight for their rights and what kind of South Africa should look after apartheid. However, she feels entitled to tell and frequently does, telling other white people how they should adjust in South Africa. She wishes to enlighten white people about apartheid’s moral and human costs through her writings, as well as to help them understand their role in the post-apartheid world.

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The Double Prosthesis: Supercrip Narratives and the Use of Disability as Storytelling Crutch in Indian Children's Stories

Mursalim Sk

Independent Researcher

The Sanskrit College and University.

Kolkata, West Bengal, India

Email: mursalimsk1837@gmail.com

Abstract

Ramendra Kumar's *Against All Odds* (2017) and Soumya Rajendran's *Wings to Fly* (2006) are simple and inspirational children's stories. However, an in-depth analysis reveals that both stories adapted the supercrip model of disability. Both stories utilized their protagonists' disabilities as narrative prosthesis and framed the plot in such a way that the protagonists triumph over their tragedy, i.e., their disability. The fundamental idea of each story relies on the protagonist's indomitable will to overcome their disability, culminating in their victory. They focused so much on their heroic triumph that they undermined the disabled protagonists' genuine experience of pain and suffering. As a result, it reduced disability to a personal tragedy that must be erased to be accepted. These stories are about disability, but they fail to promote inclusivity or affirm disability as a distinct social identity. Instead, they perpetuate harmful stereotypes by using disability as a plot device to create a feel-good narrative for non-disabled readers and thereby inspire them through tales of overcoming. Karthik, in *Against All Odds*, and Malathi, in *Wings to Fly*, tried to erase their disability and did something extraordinary for themselves. Nevertheless, they are accepted not for who and what they are, but for the remarkable achievement of defeating their disability. This article argues that beneath the inspirational surface, these two stories function as narrative prostheses, exploiting disability to craft super-crip stories that conceal the realities of ableism. The stories, thus, reinforce ableist stereotypes rather than confronting ableism or portraying disability with authenticity and inclusivity.

Keywords: Narrative Prosthesis, Supercrip, Disability, Overcome, Stereotype.



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Introduction

Disability studies is an evolving field that originated in the 1970s and 1980s in the USA and the UK as an interdisciplinary field that influenced disability critics and academics. It emerged from the disability rights movement, which challenged the medical model of disability by advancing the inclusive social model. A person with a lack of abilities to perform an activity with perfection or in a manner that is considered normal for a human being is treated as having disability. Because of these inabilities, people with disability are stigmatised, marginalised, oppressed, and humiliated. Thus, they are sidelined as not fit for the world. The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) recognises that “Persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others” (UNCRPD, 2006, p. 4). Disability theorist Michael Oliver defines impairment as “lacking part of or all of a limb, or having a defective limb, organism or mechanism of the body” (Oliver, 1999, p. 11). On the other hand, disability is best defined as “the disadvantage or restriction of activity caused by a contemporary social organisation which takes no or little account of people who have physical impairments and thus excludes them from the mainstream of society” (qtd. in Oliver, 1999, p. 11). Ramdendra Kumar’s *Against All Odds* (2017) and Soumya Rajendran’s *Wings to Fly* (2006) are two children's stories that utilise the supercrip model of disability to present feel-good stories for non-disabled readers. Both stories use the protagonists' disabilities as narrative prostheses to build their plots.

The Super-crip Model

The super-crip model within disability studies is a stereotype and a trope where a disabled person inspires non disabled people by overcoming their disability or performing something extraordinary for them. This model views disability as a personal tragedy to be overcome through indomitable will. Overcoming the disability is central to the story within this model. The story within this model primarily focuses on inspiring and motivating non-disabled people. Here, the disabled person triumphing over adversity through their sheer will makes the non-disabled people feel good. The super-crip model focuses “on disabled people overcoming disabilities. They reinforce the superiority of the non-disabled body and mind. They turn individual disabled people, who are simply leading their lives, into symbols of inspiration” (Clare, 2009, p. 2).

Narrative Prosthesis

Narrative Prosthesis is a device or tool where disability is used as a central problem to represent a story or agenda. The term is coined by David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder in *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse* (2001). The core idea is the use of disability as a crutch or prosthesis upon which a narrative is built. According to them, disability serves two functions in narrative prosthesis. Firstly, it is used as a plot device: The disability is the problem that sets the story in motion. Secondly, narrative prosthesis is used as a metaphorical device: The disability symbolises something else—evil (the disfigured villain), innocence (the person with cognitive disability), inner corruption, or societal decay. “Disability pervades literary narrative, first, as a stock feature of characterisation and, second, as an opportunistic metaphorical device. We term this perpetual discursive dependency upon disability narrative prosthesis” (Mitchel & Snyder, 2001, p. 47). The actual, material, and social experience of being disabled is erased. The

disabled character is not a person but a symbol or a problem to be solved. Mitchel and Snyder criticise literature for negatively exploring disability: “While literature often relies on disability’s transgressive potential, disabled people have been sequestered, excluded, exploited, and obliterated on the very basis on which their literary representation so often rests” (Mitchel & Snyder, 2001, p. 8).

Supercripdom and disability as narrative prosthesis in Ramendra Kumar’s *Against All Odds*

Ramdendra Kumar’s *Against All Odds* (2017) is an inspiring short story about a one-armed boy, Karthik, who defeats his disability with sheer will and extraordinary talent. However, this simple story about disabled Karthik looks inspiring on the surface. Still, his disability is taken as a narrative prosthesis to carry forward a motivating feel-good story for non-disabled people.

Karthik’s disability is the central problem that moves the story forward. He is taken as less capable. They did not take him as usual, but as someone to be pitied. Karthik’s experience with his classmates and teachers evokes pity in readers and those who care about him. It is very clear from his entry into DPS Rourkela. Sarla ma’am told Karthik she will “take special care of you” (Kumar, 2017, p. 18) because he is one-armed. Karthik felt sad to hear this from his teacher, who always thought of himself “as a normal child and wanted to be treated like one” (Kumar, 2017, p. 18).

Though the story appears inspiring on the surface, with the boy receiving sympathy and pity, it reduces the character to his disability and perpetuates certain stereotypes. Sarla ma’am’s attitude and behaviour prove this, who said, “Be kind to Karthik. ’ Sarla ma’am smiled pityingly at him” (Kumar, 2017, p. 19). At this, Karthik’s reactions said he is hurt by her words, who continuously reminded him that he is disabled: “Kartik looked down at his shoes, feeling terribly embarrassed” (Kumar, 2017, p. 19).

The story’s emotional core relies on his disability. Every emotion of the story comes from Karthik’s mistreatment by his classmates or others. His classmates humiliate and make fun of him for being one-armed. They call him ‘Tunde Karthik’, where ‘Tunde’ means one-armed person. One of them even made “a sketch of a one-armed boy, who looked quite a bit like’ Karthik, ‘hiding behind a girl. The girl was almost a replica of Kavya” (Kumar, 2017, p. 22), Karthik’s sister. Instead of accepting him as a person, the other characters always treated him as disabled, a freak, and others. Thus, perpetuates stereotypes: “In Rourkela, almost every second day, he was reminded that he was different” (Kumar, 2017, p. 30). Karthik’s disability is a crutch or prosthesis that carries the story from the outset. Karthik’s disability is taken as a problem, as a personal tragedy that needs to be fixed to accept him. However, this problem is not individual but a social construction: “The ‘problem’ is not the person with disabilities; the problem is the way that normalcy is constructed to create the ‘problem’ of the disabled person” (Davis, 1995, p. 24).

A super-crip story focuses on disabled people overcoming their disabilities. “They reinforce the superiority of the nondisabled body and mind. They turn individual disabled people, who are simply leading their lives, into symbols of inspiration” (Clare, 2009, p. 2). *Against All Odds* is a super-crisp story in which the protagonist, Karthik, inspires not only the characters within the story but also readers. Karthik is seen as having miraculous talent and did something that even non disabled people fail to do.

His classmates and coach do not accept Karthik until he proves his extraordinariness. He is not accepted as he is, i.e., a disabled boy. He is accepted because he has overcome his disability, which inspires the people around him. He has extraordinary knowledge about football. Because of his extreme knowledge about football, he inspired and guided Tina and Sanjay. Although Karthik is not a goalkeeper, he has extensive knowledge about goalkeepers. He passed that knowledge to Tina, a female goalkeeper: “Always remember, Tina, keepers are not merely defenders –they have to attack too” (Kumar, 2017, p. 48). With the help of Karthik’s suggestions, Tina saved goals, and their team won the inter-school football tournament.

On the other hand, Sanjay was a hater of Karthik. Sanjay is first found to be “targeting Karthik at every opportunity. He would try to push him, trip him, or crash heavily into him” (Kumar, 2017, p. 52). After noticing Sanjay’s performance, Karthik suggested, “I know you have always played back. But I think, given your strength and stamina, a Centre defensive midfielder would be the ideal spot” (Kumar, 2017, p. 53). Sanjay did what Karthik suggested and performed better. Later, he thanked and cherished Karthik: “For the last couple of days, I have been playing as a Centre defensive midfielder, and the result has been great ... Thanks dude” (Kumar, 2017, p. 53).

The question arises of whether Karthik did not have extensive knowledge of the game or was an average footballer. Would his classmates or people around him ever accept him and stop booing him for his disability? The answer is no. This proves the story through the protagonist Karthik is not spreading harmony, normalcy, or accepting disability as a distinct identity. It actually perpetuates the idea that a disabled person will be accepted and cherished if they have extraordinary talent, if they overcome their disability. This is what a super-crip, inspiration porn story does. The story emphasises that achievement and disability are two opposite poles. They cannot go hand in hand. A super-crip story affirms disability as helplessness. So “to believe that achievement contradicts disability is to pair helplessness with disability (Clare, 2009, p. 9).

The coach Peter Sir’s change in attitude, i.e., from doubt to admiration, is a fundamental mechanism of the super-crip trope. Peter Sir only values Karthik after his stellar performance. He is not accepted and given respect as a fundamental human right, but he earned it through his extraordinary performance. As a result, this extraordinariness places a heavy pressure and burden on the disabled character. An average performance from a disabled person would not be worthy of the same respect. Peter Sir did not consider Karthik a whole person because of his disability. He moves from seeing him as less than to seeing him as more than. Both of his views are dehumanising because they do not consider him to be normal. This proves that the super-crip narrative is less about authentic representation of disability and more about reinforcing a moral fable for the non-disabled.

The story’s super-crip trope becomes clearer when Sunil Chhetri arrives to see the young players play. The author presented Karthik in “a make-or-break moment” (Kumar, 2017, p. 57). Karthik realised that “even if he excelled in academics and extra-curricular activities, he would continue to be an object of sympathy to be pitied or an oddity to be ridiculed” (Kumar 57). Karthik is determined to excel in football. He understood that if he did some miraculous performance in football, “people would see him as normal” (Kumar, 2017, p. 57). “Karthik played his heart out” (Kumar, 2017, p. 57) to erase, to overcome his disability and become one of the abled. Karthik owns the supercripdom as a shield. As Clare said, we make supercrip our own, particularly the type that pushes into the extraordinary, cracks into our physical limitations.

We use supercripdom as a shield, a protection, as if this individual internalisation could defend us against disability oppression (Clare, 2009, p. 9). Karthik impressed Sunil Chhetri with his technique and enthusiasm and got selected for the school team.

In the Synergy Cup, Karthik's DPS team qualified for the finals. Karthik was in the team. His coach did not select him for a single match in the whole tournament. Nevertheless, he got a chance to play in the last moment of the game as a replacement for an injured player. He was again humiliated when he fell on the ground from a kick from an opponent player: "Football is not a game for guys like you" (Kumar, 2017, p. 83). His disability is the central problem; throughout the story, he tries his best to defeat this problem. At the climax of the story, Karthik, with his technique and game plan, changed the scorecard from 1-1 to 1-2 and won the game for his team. Suddenly, Karthik became a hero: "Karthik was lifted on the shoulders of his mates as they did a victory lap" (Kumar, 2017, p. 84). His disability is a crutch or prosthesis, which the author utilised throughout the story to make a feel-good story and inspire non-disabled people.

Supercripdom and disability as narrative prosthesis in Soumya Rajendran's *Wings to Fly*

Soumya Rajendran's *Wings to Fly* (2006) is an excellent short story for children about Malathi Holla. She is a lame girl who "lost the strength in her legs" (Rajendran 9) when she contracted a great fever at the age of one. The story conveys that with a strong will and perseverance, one can achieve everything one wishes. Malathi Holla, despite her disability, conquers everything she desires. From the outset, the story looks like a fantastic story about a firm girl who wins with extraordinary performance, inspiring the reader. However, a deeper look at the trope reveals that the story is nothing but a supercrip story that utilises Malathi's disability as a narrative prosthesis. Overcoming the disability is the key theme in the story. This overcoming theme is the main point of the super-crip story.

The emotional core of the story relies on the lame girl Malathi. Malathi's disability evokes pity not only in those around her but also in the readers. She is seen as dependent on other people. Her family is sympathetic to her. Malathi is loved by everyone in her family, especially his brother and father. "She was his favourite" (Rajendran, 2006, p. 13). His eldest brother loved her so much he "would put her in the carrier of his cycle" (Rajendran, 2006, p. 13), and she enjoyed a good time with him. He also brought her to the cinema hall. This support reminds us every time that she is a wheelchair-disabled girl.

Malathi is shown as a strong girl. When her doctor told her to exercise (Rajendran, 2006, p. 15) to make her fit and fine, she took the advice to heart. She loved exercising. The doctor's suggestion to make her fit is a prime example of overcoming the disability. Her disability is her personal tragedy, which requires a cure. Though disabled, "she liked to play" (Rajendran, 2006, p. 15). She dreamed of winning medals as "she loved the medals". Later on, when she became 18 years old, she actually won what she had dreamed of. Here, the author showed her indomitable will and perseverance, which finally made her a winner: "She won two gold medals and two silver medals at the first national sports meet for the disabled" (Rajendran, 2006, p. 16). This indomitable will and perseverance are the key criticisms that super-crip critics raise. Here, the pain and suffering of a disabled person is sidelined, and it is shown that willpower can help someone to achieve the thing they crave.

Disability is used as a narrative trope, a narrative prosthesis in the story by the author. Malathi's winning of the medal became a newspaper headline. The author showed us that

disability could not defeat her; she defeated disability by winning in life despite having it. Disability and achievement contradict each other. A disabled person winning a competition is not natural. This is why Malathi's winning as a disabled girl "made her famous". Her winning is not a regular event; thus, when she won, "she was in the newspaper" (Rajendran, 2006, p. 17). Through her victory, the author is not liberating people with disabilities but actually perpetuating stereotypes and a hostile atmosphere about disability.

Author Rajendran showed Malathi how to be a successful bank employee. It is seen that she cannot do certain things, but she can do some things better than the so-called non-disabled people. Author Rajendran described that Malathi acquired such a strong brain that she can remember every detail of people's bank accounts, starting from name, bank account number, and even "how much money they had when they could not themselves" (Rajendran, 2006, p. 19). The story promotes that disabled people can be accepted only if they are extraordinary. A disabled person with average skill and intelligence cannot be accepted. It can burden people with disabilities and push them to despair.

Author Soumya Rajendran's extraordinary trope culminates in the story's climax when she wins a race with male competitors. The author showed her indomitable fighter attitude when, during a track event in Ahmedabad, no woman registered their name, only Malathi herself. The organisers did not allow her to participate as they "need at least three participants" (Rajendran, 2006, p. 21), which was "the rule". However, she was not ready to accept that. She participated in the men's category: "I will race with the men" (Rajendran, 2006, p. 21). The author undermines the pain and suffering Malathi went through. The story focused more on her indomitable will and resilience than on her physical and mental hardships.

Conclusion

Both *Against All Odds* (2017) and *Wings to Fly* (2006) follow the same track where disability is used as a narrative prosthesis and storytelling crutch. The core of both texts relies on the protagonists overcoming their disability through their sheer and indomitable will, thus inspiring non-disabled readers. Following the supercrip model of disability, both stories end up with a feel-good moment for non-disabled readers who are motivated after reading them. Instead of spreading harmony and normalcy about disability, they actually perpetuate harmful stereotypes about disability. They focus so much on the protagonists' winning that they undermine their sufferings and pain. Eli Clare rightfully said that stories about disability should talk about the lack of conditions like lack of access, employment, education, and personal attendant services that disabled people witness. They should talk about stereotypes and the oppression that disabled people face. They should talk about disability as a distinct, diverse identity. Unfortunately, "these stories (supercrip) rely upon the perception that disability and achievement contradict each other and that any disabled person who overcomes this contradiction is heroic" (Clare, 2009, p. 8-9). To conclude, "the dominant story about disability should be about ableism, not the inspirational supercrip crap, the believe-it-or-not disability story" (Clare, 2009, p. 3). Thus, the disability story should promote inclusivity and must-see disability as a distinct social identity.

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Easterine Kire's Saga of the Indigenous Naga Worldview and the Politics of Resistance in *Sky is My Father: A Naga Village Remembered*

Deepanjali Baruah, PhD
Assistant Professor in English
Jagannath Barooah University
Jorhat, Assam, India.
Email: deepanjalibaruah73@gmail.com

Abstract

Easterine Kire is an Indian English writer from Kohima, Nagaland, currently living in Norway. Nagaland, a state in northeast India, is a treasure trove of rich traditions, narratives, and oral histories. Home to seventeen major tribes and numerous sub-tribes, the state boasts a diverse cultural heritage. Their cultural heritage and storytelling form the foundation for much of Nagaland's literary creativity, offering writers both inspiration and responsibility. By reimagining oral narratives, these writers strive to make the traditional Naga worldview and historical memory relevant to the present generation. Easterine Kire's *Sky is My Father* is one such historical novel, portraying the courage of a proud Naga village that repeatedly defied British advances and withstood their sieges, thereby preserving its identity and resilience against colonial domination. Their defiance was more than a military resistance—it embodied a moral force that bound the community together, shaping its collective identity and reinforcing the values of unity and resilience. Building on this, the present paper seeks to analyze the continuing relevance of the Naga traditional worldview and its significance in shaping identity, literature, and history, comprising the myths and symbols that form the Naga social and cultural life.



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Introduction

Easterine Kire is an Indian English writer from Kohima, Nagaland, currently living in Norway. She is a novelist, children's book writer, poet, short story writer, and translator. Some of her notable books are *Sky is My Father: A Naga Village Remembered* (2003), *Mari* (2010), *Bitter Wormhood* (2011), *When the River Sleeps* (2014), *Son of the Thundercloud* (2016), *Don't Run My Love* (2017), *Spirit Nights* (2022), etc. She has been awarded various literary prizes for her creations, including the Governor's medal for her contribution to Naga Literature in 2011, the Hindu Lit for Life prize for her novel *When the River Sleeps* in 2016, and the Sahitya Akademi Award for her novel *Spirit Nights* in 2024. She is a member of Jazz poesy, a band based in Norway. Kire has pioneered modern-day literary culture in Nagaland and established herself as one of the most important contributors to contemporary tribal/indigenous literature.

Nagaland, a state in the northeast of India, is a treasure trove of rich traditions, narratives, and oral histories. Home to seventeen major tribes and numerous sub-tribes, the state boasts a diverse cultural heritage. According to historical accounts, these tribes are believed to have migrated from present-day China and Tibet, with some estimates tracing their migration back to the 13th Century. The Naga tribes possess a wealth of indigenous knowledge and history, sustained through lived experiences, communal practices, and oral traditions transmitted across generations. Their cultural heritage and storytelling form the foundation for much of Nagaland's literary creativity, offering writers both inspiration and responsibility. By reimagining oral narratives, these writers strive to make the traditional Naga worldview and historical memory relevant to the present generation. *Sky is My Father* is one such historical novel, portraying the courage of a proud Naga village that repeatedly defied British advances and withstood their sieges, thereby preserving its identity and resilience against colonial domination. High in the mountains lay a small village whose warriors, though outnumbered and ill-equipped, stood with unmatched courage against the British. Their defiance was more than a military resistance—it embodied a moral force that bound the community together, shaping its collective identity and reinforcing the values of unity and resilience. Kire has brought the vibrant Naga culture and its oral narratives into focus. Kire spoke in an interview, "I usually explain that we, writing from the hills, have the backdrop of the hills of history, culture, religion, and politics behind us" (In Conversation With: Easterine Kire). The author illustrates how this spirit of resistance becomes deeply integrated into Naga traditional and social life, forming an inherent aspect of their cultural normality. Building on this, the present paper seeks to analyze the continuing relevance of the Naga traditional worldview and its significance in shaping identity, literature, and history, comprising the myths and symbols that form the Naga social and cultural life. The paper will also shed light on the resistance of a small Naga community against the British—an unrelenting form of guerrilla warfare that, though absent from contemporary headlines, sent ripples of anxiety through the colonial regime. It will further examine how these acts of defiance, carried out by a subaltern and politically marginalized community, challenged and unsettled the hegemonic order of colonial power.

The Indigenous Naga Worldview in *Sky is My Father: A Naga Village Remembered*

The term indigenous has gone beyond the discipline of anthropology in contemporary times. "The international agencies are increasingly and extensively making use of this term and concept in their deliberations and discussions" (Xaxa, 2023, p.3590). After this, the term has begun to

occupy several discourses, including those of general discourse and other social sciences. In the northeast, indigenous or tribal people enjoy the right to practice their traditions and rituals, maintain their culture, and retain their specific identities. The Nagas are a prominent tribe of northeast India, comprising 16 to 20 sub-tribes numbering between 2.5 and 3.5 million. The Naga territory is known as Nagaland, and each tribe speaks a different language. The prolific writer Easterine Kire, who hails from Nagaland, belongs to the Angami tribe known for their excellent skills in farming, weaving, art and craft, and warfare. In the novel *Sky is My Father: A Naga Village Remembered*, Easterine Kire has beautifully projected the indigenous worldview of the Angami Nagas, with their unique culture, in which the human world and the world of spirits intersect. Through the examples of spectacular oral narratives and rituals, the writer has portrayed the inextricable link between the human and spirit worlds. The novel revolves around Khonoma, which, according to Kire, “nestles amid mountains that are as high as 7,000 feet; a little village on a small hillock cradled by gaunt mountains that form natural fortress” (Kire, 2018, p.vii). During the colonial period, Khonoma had only 500 houses, but its reputation spread far and wide for its warriors, who were willing to sacrifice their lives in defense of their land and people. “Her warriors of the Semo, Thevo, and Merhu clans hardly numbered over thousand at any given time in her history. However, Khonoma’s protectorate extended in every direction, to the southern, eastern, and western Angami villages and some other Naga villages” (Kire, 2018, p.vii).

The narrative weaves together personal and collective histories, drawing on the author’s deep understanding of Naga culture and history. This is the story of Penno, her husband Levi, and their sons Sato and Roko, who grapple with the challenges of living in a rapidly changing world. The women are shown to engage in ceaseless labour throughout the year to ensure a good harvest. It is imperative for the characters in the novel to bow to the spirits who shower their blessings for a bountiful harvest with reverence. Levi is a good Naga warrior who believes in spirits for peace and prosperity. “If you honour the spirits, they will bless you; if you defy them, you will learn how mortal man is” (Kire, 2018, p.50). Spirit worship holds significant cultural importance among the Nagas and the other indigenous tribes of the northeast. “Nagas attributed spiritual existence to every element of the natural world, including trees, stones, water bodies, animals, and many more, and they are pacified through rituals and sacrifices” (Vinita & Mathews, 2023, p.70). The Naga worldview is expressed through this unique cultural system, in which magic and reality are juxtaposed. They believe in the blessings of the sun, and the rain, and the mother of Levi and Lato teaches her sons to fill up their granaries with the help of the magic of the sun, the rain, and hard work. The spirit *Vo-o* is called by the *Thevo* priest during the *Terbase*, a ritual of making peace with the spirits, which helps to coordinate between the man and the spirit so that there is no destruction, disease, or death in the village.

In the Khonoma village, the Nagas indulge themselves in hunting spree, and the killing of a tiger is considered to be a heroic task. A character in the novel Vilao kills a tiger, which raises interest among the brothers Levi and Lato. After killing the tiger, Vilao has to perform some mandatory rituals, such as spending five days as *genna* days, which means no-work days. Most people would come out of their houses to see the dead tiger and the hero who killed it. There are stories around tigers and tiger hunting. There is a blurred boundary between the spirit and the human world. The Nagas believe that spirits may transform themselves into tigers, snakes, or even into men and women. The tiger is also understood to be the “elder brother” (Kire, 2018, p.

18): “it is because man, tiger, and spirit were once brothers” (Kire, 2018, p. 18). The people of Khonoma also believed in weretigers, just like the people in the West believe in werewolves. “Werewolf, in popular legend, is a human who can shape-shift into a wolf or a hybrid wolf-human form. In many werewolf stories, this transformation occurs at night, often under the influence of a full moon” (Britannica). On the other hand, the weretiger is a part of the Naga mythology. Basically, the Angami tribe of Nagaland believes in the *tekbumiavi*, a human whose soul enters the body of a tiger while the human body normally functions.

Levi is known as one of the warriors of Khonoma. The warriors in Khonoma are highly revered. Levi’s uncle Kovi is proud of his nephew’s courage and strength, but he always gives him advice as an elder. “You are a warrior of Khonoma. People will think twice when they hear your name. So step into your life carefully. Be humble, heed the taboos, and there is no reason why you should not have a full and long life” (Kire, 2018, p.53). The warrior acts as the saviour, protector, and carrier of the values of the Naga tribe. Kire is proud of her tribe, which brings glory to Nagaland through their strong faith in the history, myth, culture, and deeds of valour. In this connection, it may be argued that the indigenous people remained outside the larger socio-political or economic system. They basically wanted to stay away from the people of the plains and wanted to maintain their distinctiveness. This worldview was more prevalent during the colonial period. “They are all tribes because they all stood more or less outside of Hindu civilisation and not because they were all at exactly the same stage of evolution” (Xaxa, 1919, p.3593). The indigenous, rich cultural values of the Khonoma village and the strong sense of independence drove its men to safeguard the village’s unity and integrity, even at the cost of their own lives, against aggressive forces such as the British. The people of Khonoma still gather around bonfires to share the stories of an indelible and brave past with young Naga people, so that they may firmly adhere to their roots and the teachings of the Angami culture.

Politics of Resistance

Sky is My Father reveals how the tiny village of Khonoma in Nagaland puts up a strong resistance against the British a number of times, encouraging the other villages to join them as well. Easterine Kire, in the introduction of her novel, has narrated the history of the aggressive encroachment of the outside world upon Khonoma since the 1800s briefly:

The officers of the British Imperial Army recorded that the fiercest resistance to colonial rule was in these hills of the Naga tribes. Khonoma, an Angami village of warriors, fought from the moment of their entry till 1880 when a major offensive was launched against the village, ending in a stalemate. Prior to that, the British launched three attacks on the village of Khonoma, referred to as Khwunoria by its inhabitants, and appearing as Konemah in British records (Kire, 2018, p.vii-ix).

The resistance displayed by the Nagas of Khonoma against the British forms the backdrop of Kire’s novel. Foucault stated that there are points of resistance everywhere when there is a power network. There are two types of resistance: cultural and political. Cultural resistance is less demanding than political resistance. Stephen Duncombe has stated,

Cultural resistance can also be thought of as political resistance. Some theorists argue that politics is essentially a cultural discourse, a shared set of symbols and meanings, that we all abide by. If this is true, then the rewriting of that discourse - which is essentially what cultural resistance does - is a political act in itself (2002, p.7).

Therefore, it may be argued that cultural resistance can also be expressed through political activities. The resistance shown in the novel is both political and cultural. The Khonoma warriors fought fiercely against the British several times. There were twenty-two Naga raids into the territory of the British. In one of the attacks, Levi was trapped, and later he found himself in a closed cell of a prison with other men. The male characters in the novel started to gather arms and ammunition to fight against the British, leaving their work in the fields. They fortified themselves very well and sent the women and children to the nearby villages for security. Levi had to live at the Tezpur jail and was released after six years of imprisonment. After he came out of prison, he married a girl named Penu, who became a devoted wife and a loving mother.

In *Sky is My Father*, the politics of resistance is explored through the struggles of the people of Khonoma against the external forces that attempt to undermine their culture, identity, and way of life. The narrative reflects the personal and collective challenges faced by the characters as they resist colonial domination, military occupation, and pressures of modernity. Therefore, cultural resistance is similar to that of political. Resistance in the novel is not just about armed conflict but also takes the form of cultural preservation, defiance in the face of adversity, and individual and community resistance. The characters strive to maintain their traditions, beliefs, and sense of self amid forces that seek to dominate or oppress them. Later on after independence when Nagaland was given the statehood in 1963, December 1, “to satisfy the national aspirations of the Nagas, article 371A was incorporated in the constitution, ensuring that no act of parliament would bring any change in religious or social practices, customary laws, traditional ownership patterns in Naga society without the consent of the Nagaland Legislative Assembly” (Srikanth, 2014, p.42).

In 1979, Mr. Damant, the political agent, marched towards Khonoma with 21 military and 65 police troops. The people of Khonoma did not know Mr. Damant's clear intention. However, the aggressive nature of Mr. Damant and his men led the Khonoma men to prepare for a fierce fight. Suddenly, a shot was fired, and Mr. Damant was dead. “The victory spurred the men of the village. The men in the foreground, shouting terrible war cries, began to give chase to the escort of the political party. Caught in a volley of shots, thirty-eight men were killed and nineteen wounded in this encounter” (Kire, 2018, p.88-89). The people of Khonoma were so excited that they began to shout, “we have ousted the white man’s rule” (Kire, 2018, p.89). However, at the next moment, they could realize that there were numerous British enemies, and the hope of killing them all was utter foolishness. But they had a great confidence that they would strike the British and crush them completely. The mountain region, the dark forests, wild animals, and the fearless Angami Naga people posed a great danger for the British. At the same time, they put up a steady resistance against the European officers. “The bungalows of the two European officers were constantly under fire because the Angami strategy was focused on first killing the European officers” (Kire, 2018, p.96). The British were strategically planning to crush Khonoma once and for all after the killing of Mr. Damant. But the Naga warriors were not going to surrender so easily. According to Baudrillard, the strategies of resistance may be transformed into strategies of control. These people are known for their community solidarity, conception of masculinity, and self-respect. They love their people, land, culture, society, and the forests, which served as fortresses for them while they were attacked by the British. So they will resist in continuum to retain their control over their land and people. The internal self-image of the Nagas has been a particularly strong one, which helps them to sustain their warrior status. They held the British for

four months. But the time for negotiation came as the Nagas killed the last British, as they killed some of them by entering into the territory of Assam. The warrior Pelhu did not want to make peace with the British, but he could not defy the advice of the elders and finally approached the British for the restoration of peace and order in the Naga land. Ultimately, a treaty was concluded between Khonoma and the British on 27 March 1880.

The resistance displayed by the Nagas in Khonoma, though indigenous, shook the power and glory of the British Empire in India for a considerable period of time. In the words of Scott, “they are the stubborn bedrock upon which other forms of resistance may grow, and they are like to persist after such other forms have failed or produced, in turn, a new pattern of inequity” (2005, p.404). The collective resistance of the Angami Nagas from Khonoma village reflects the conditions and constraints on the basis of which it is generated. The otherwise peaceful village saw sudden changes with the threatening advancement of the colonial forces. The Nagas, who led a carefree life, had to leave their work in their fields and get involved in warfare against the British.

The political action and cultural forms play a dominant role in the creation of resistance. The politics of tradition and modernity during the British rule had an impact on this small Khonoma village, too. It was during the advent of the missionaries that the conversion of the Naga tribes began. Since the Nagas of Khonoma village were strictly traditional, adhering to their values, morale, and religion, those who converted to Christianity were ostracized by the village. Levi is heartbroken when his son Sato embraces the new religion. Sato is sent by his father to a white man’s school for the purpose of education. He is influenced by the teachings of the Bible and subsequently converts to Christianity. The cultural resistance is portrayed through Levi’s struggle in persuading his son to maintain his indigenous Naga worldview and identity in the face of external pressures. The father is devastated at this, “How is it, my son, that you have turned your back on all that we’ve taught you of what is good of our ways?” (Kire, 2018, p.126-127). The father refuses to accept his son and turns him out of his house. Kire thus portrays the tension between tradition and change and the ways in which the Nagas resist the cultural erasure. Nevertheless, a strong cultural resistance is displayed by the clansmen against the converts, for they are outcasts from the village. A new settlement of the converts begins to grow beside the village “because their excommunication meant they were cut off from all links with their old village” (Kire, 2018, p. 128). The novel portrays the ways in which the resistance is often shown by the Nagas in their emotional and spiritual connections to their land, language, rituals, and familial bonds.

Conclusion

Easterine Kire’s *Sky is My Father* is not only a historical retelling of the Khonoma warriors’ defiance against British imperialism but also an affirmation of the cultural, spiritual, and ecological values that sustain Naga identity. It may be argued that the Nagas were one of the valiant tribes in the whole of northeast India who resisted against the British, “the officers of the Imperial Army recorded that the fiercest resistance to colonial rule was in these hills of Naga tribes” (Kire, 2018, p. vii). By narrating the repeated clashes between the Khonoma villagers and the colonial forces, Kire situates the Nagas within the larger discourse of anti-colonial resistance in northeast India, demonstrating that their struggle, though often overlooked, posed a genuine challenge to the hegemonic ambitions of the British Empire. Yet the novel transcends the

boundaries of political history. It weaves together oral traditions, rituals, and ecological consciousness, thereby highlighting how the Naga worldview is inseparably tied to community, morality, and harmony with the natural world.

The Nagas' belief in the spiritual essence of all living beings reflects an enduring ecological philosophy that continues to resonate in contemporary debates on sustainability. Their reverence for sacred landscapes and commitment to sustainable practices present an indigenous model of environmental ethics that modern societies can learn from. At the same time, Kire's characters embody cultural resilience, confronting pressures of modernization and Christianization without surrendering the essence of their traditions. Their acts of preservation are a form of cultural resistance—an assertion of identity against the homogenizing forces of colonial and global modernity.

In bringing these histories and worldviews into the literary space, Kire performs the vital task of cultural remembrance, ensuring that the struggles and values of the Naga people are not lost to the margins of history. *Sky is My Father* thus becomes more than a novel; it is a testimony of survival, a celebration of indigenous resilience, and a reminder that cultural memory can be as powerful a weapon of resistance as armed defiance. By foregrounding both political and cultural resistance, Kire underscores the relevance of the Naga worldview in contemporary times, where questions of identity, belonging, and ecological responsibility remain as urgent as ever.

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The Brahmin's Voice and the Dalit's Silence: An Ambedkarite Reading of Rabindranath Tagore's *Punishment*

David Das

Assistant Professor

Department of English

Kabi Nazrul College

West Bengal, India.

Email daviddas563@gmail.com

Abstract:

This article rereads Rabindranath Tagore's short story *Punishment* through the dual lenses of Ambedkarite social philosophy and Dalit literary criticism. Tagore, a universal humanist, unconsciously reproduces a text that is structured by caste hierarchies. A social allegory of Brahmanical hegemony, Dalit servitude, and patriarchal displacement is clearly evident in this story of two Dalit brothers, Dukhiram and Chidam, their wives, Radha and Chandra, and the Brahmin Ramlochan. This article argues using the Ambedkarite theoretical lens on caste that the text is evidence of dramatization of psychic and moral disintegration of Dalit lives under caste oppression, imposition of sacrificial role on Dalit women, and the author's own conscious/unconscious upper-caste perspective that anesthetizes rather than annihilates structural caste violence.



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Email: confluence.ssjgc@gmail.com

Keywords: Dalit Literature, Dalit Hermeneutics, Tagore, Brahmanism, Ambedkar, Semiotics, Determinism, Positioning

Introduction: The Silent Caste in a Humanist Text

Punishment is a translation of the Bengali short story *Shasti* by Rabindranath Tagore. It is often read as a story of tragic irony, patriarchal domination of women, and moral blindness. What is fundamental to the story's structure is that the caste locations of the story's characters are often omitted in most readings of Tagore's works, where Dukhiram and Chidam being landless Dalit dependent on Brahmin landlord Ramlochan, who "owed him a lot of back rent" of the house (Husain, 2017, p. 205). This story, which is much appreciated for highlighting universal moral tragedy, but, at the core, fails to highlight it as a caste parable. An Ambedkarite reading would interpret the text as how Brahmanical domination furthers intra-Dalit violence and ritualizes the punishment of the oppressed. Tagore, being a Brahmin man, is complicated by the paraphernalia of the caste structure prevalent in society, which makes him sensitive on residing in the domain of humanism but leaves him socially blind. Thus, regarding this criticism, Kancha Ilaiah Shepherd in his book *Why I am Not a Hindu*, notes, "the upper-caste humanist can sympathize but cannot dismantle caste" (Ilaiah, 1996, p. 53). Caste hierarchy is naturalized in his narrative, which is operated within an epistemic frame. The very title *Punishment* implies moral retribution or tragedy, submission to an ordained order. Kalpana Bardhan writes, "The oppressor is ultimately some aspect of the cultural ideology and the social situation in which both men and women feel themselves trapped because of some socially bred dysfunction of the individual will and psyche" (Bardhan, 1990, p. 14).

Theoretical Framework: Ambedkarite Hermeneutics and Dalit Aesthetics

A critical foundation for a Dalit reading of Tagore's short story would be provided by Ambedkar's philosophy. The concept of division of labour, irrespective of one's own birth, is universal. However, when caste is applied, it becomes complicated, as Ambedkar tells, "Caste System is not merely division of labour. It is also division of labourers." (Ambedkar, 2013, p. 29). Graded inequality, as Ambedkar termed it, has its roots in religion, as supported by Brahmanical texts, particularly the Manusmriti. In mainstream Indian writings, aesthetic imagination plays an important role, but, as Saran Kumar Limbale argues, in Dalit aesthetics it arises from "experience of social slavery, not imagination" (Limbale, 2004, p. 31). Critically applying this theoretical framework would require two positions: the social texture of oppression in the narrative and the ideological blindness of its Brahmin author. A New Criticism approach might minimize textual structure, revealing the caste logic behind linguistic and narrative patterns, e.g., names, hunger, guilt, and silence. On the contrary, an Ambedkarite re-reading re-historicizes and exposes it.

The Semiotics of Naming

According to Manusmriti (2.31-32), the name a Brahmin bears "auspiciousness" and "happiness" whereas the name of a Sudra bears the connotation of "disdain" and "service" (Olivelle, 2005, p. 96). The dogmatic prescription of Manusmriti finds its wholesome application in Tagore's short story. The onomastics of the two 'Rui family' brothers is clothed in caste-based connotation in this story. The nomenclature of the two "low-caste Rui family" Dalit brothers are Dukhiram and Chidam (Modak & Misra, 2014, p. 632). The Bengali meaning of these two names is 'full of sorrow' and 'torn apart', which bear the semantic weight of degradation. Quite contrary, the name of a Brahmin neighbor is Ramlochan, which literally means the eye of Rama. It metaphorically conveys the notion of purity and divine vision. This is how the language of the

text is systematically structured in the frame of caste-based hierarchy. Thus, the ideological inscription of caste hierarchy in the nomenclature is not accidental but conscious on the part of the author. Brahmanism ensured castes in names, and Tagore wittily carried it forward, where mere utterance of one's names marks social rank. The story's first punishment is the very identity of names, where a Dalit man is linguistically condemned before he speaks. The meaning of the name 'Chandra' is moon. In mainstream reading, the moon is often seen as gentle and luminous. Tagore's description of Chandra goes like- "Chandra was no more than seventeen or eighteen. Her face was soft and round, her stature not very tall. There was such a tilt in her petite, lithe limbs that every movement seemed fluid and rhythmic... her restless, bright, black eyes by parting slightly the aanchal, end of her sari with two fingers" (Hussain, 2016, p. 207). A Dalit perspective is somewhat different. The moon has no light of its own. Its visibility depends on the sun. Therefore, its light is borrowed, reflected, and derivative. Caste-ridden society positions Dalits as secondary beings in relation to the upper-castes. Chandra's voice is like a periodic eclipse of the moon, which is overshadowed by patriarchal authority and caste-coded control over female agency. Chandra's beauty is like an emptied luminosity, without autonomy.

The moon in Dalit literature is often portrayed as faded dignity, systematic silencing, borrowed existence, and erasure under dominant narratives. Radha is the wife of elder brother Dukhiram. In vernacular and Puranic traditions, Radha becomes a paradoxical and problematic figure for Brahmanical interpreters. Her desire is illicit, transgressive, destabilizing to varnaashrama dharma, and coded as asuddha, meaning impure or obscene. Therefore, Brahmanical commentators defend this discomfort by mythologizing her desire into divine bhakti, sanitizing the illicitness as a metaphysical metaphor, and subsuming her sexual agency into Krishna's divinity. To maintain Brahmanical moral hegemony, her agency is erased. Tagore depicts Radha as quarrelsome. The quarrelsome quality of Radha must have a Brahmanical purification; she must be disciplined and allegorized through death. Regarding the connotation of these names that Tagore assigned to his characters can well align with the observation Ambedkar made in his *Annihilation of Caste*, "The literature of the Hindus is full of caste genealogies in which an attempt is made to give a noble origin to one caste and an ignoble origin to other castes" (Ambedkar, 2013, p. 35).

Labour, Hunger, and Humiliation: The Structure of Exploitation

Dalit economic life is ingrained in caste. The unrewarded toil of the brothers returning home after the whole day's work is narrated in the story. "Only the two brothers were forced by the landlord's thugs to work on his house. All day they worked on his house... They could not come home for lunch... they were probably not paid for their labours and the abuses that were hurled at them throughout the day were more than what they deserved" (Hussain, 2016, p. 204-205). They worked throughout their entire lives for the landlord, but in return, wages were withheld, and they suffered humiliation. It is a recurring motif of economic expropriation. Taking references from *The Sapru Committee*, Ambedkar writes, "The Depressed Classes (Dalits) have no economic independence in most parts of the Presidency. Some cultivate the lands of the orthodox classes as their tenants at will. Others live on their earnings as farm labourers... Orthodox Classes have used their economic power as a weapon against those depressed classes in their villages, when the latter have dared to exercise their rights, and have

evicted them from their land, and stopped their employment and discontinued their remuneration as village servants” (Ambedkar, 1947, p. 40).

One can cross-verify what Ambedkar quotes with the help of a critical observation of R. C. Dutt: “Zemindars (upper-caste men) still possess to an indefinite extent the power to oppress, harass and ruin their ryots (peasants/Dalits) in a variety of ways against which the law offers no redress, and that therefore in most places ryots are still held in a sort of moral servitude, and comply, without thinking of resistance, with the most unjust demands and orders of their masters” (Dutt, 1874, p. 134). Being deprived of food, space, and dignity, Dalit Dukhiram’s final act of murder is the psychic outburst of systematic dehumanization. Tagore’s omniscient narration records their hunger and humiliation within poetic restraint but lacks political revolt. Sharmila Rege’s observation is very similar to it, that “upper-caste humanism converts the pain of caste into moral emotion, not political critique” (Rege, 2006, p. 57). Landlords (belonging to the upper-castes) are one of the agents in the structure of exploitation. Through this mechanism, they perpetuate cheap or unpaid labour, hunger, and humiliation to the Dalit communities. Therefore, Ambedkar, in order to end landlordism, writes in his *States and Minorities*, “The land shall be let out to villagers without distinction of castes and creed and in such manner that there will be no landlord, no tenant and no landless labourers” (Ambedkar, 1947, p. 16)

Parallel Determinisms: From Caste Mechanism to Cosmic Absurdity

Dukhiram “unthinkingly picked up his axe and brought it down upon her head. Radha fell near Chandra’s lap and died instantaneously” (Hussain, 2016, p. 205). This act of killing his wife in *Punishment* has often been dismissed as a moment of domestic impulsiveness. However, a Dalit critical lens would interpret it somewhat differently. It is a result of the violent culmination of an entire system of caste-based discrimination and exploitation. His ill temper, anger, and despair are not his weaknesses but symptoms of structural oppression. It is a spontaneous eruption of a man who “worked” all day, “not paid for their labours” and “abused... hurled at them throughout the day”, room was “pleasureless”, “hunger gnawing inside his stomach” and suffered “humiliation” (Hussain, 2016, p. 204-205) which is a systematic denial by Brahmanical social mechanism that controls both his body and his labour. Taking Dukhiram’s condition into account, an analogy can be drawn with a character named Meursault in Albert Camus’s novel *The Outsider* (1942). Under the scorching heat of the sunlight, Meursault kills an Arab man on a beach in Algiers. “The sun was the same as it had been the day I’d buried Maman, and like then, my forehead especially was hurting me, all the veins in it throbbing under the skin. ... The trigger gave; I felt the smooth underside of the butt; and there, in that noise, sharp and deafening at the same time, is where it all started” (Camus, 1989, p. 59). His killing is often interpreted as an act of existential compulsion and not a deliberate attempt because he had no earlier hatred or motive for killing him. By placing Dukhiram’s act alongside Meursault’s, Tagore’s *Punishment* can be read as a proto-existential exploration of caste-based absurdity. Dukhiram’s experience is universalized in comparison with *The Outsider*.

The Brahmin’s Role: Ramlochan as Custodian as Caste Morality

Brahmins, by caste, act as moral authorities and mediators in a village within the Brahmanical social order. Ramlochan is not an exception in this story. Chidam obediently adheres to the proposal of Ramlochan to accuse Chandra of Radha’s murder. Tagore narrates, “The original

idea was Ramlochan's" (Hussain, 2016, p. 209). Caste psychology is strongly highlighted in these lines, where a Brahmin's suggestion becomes law as Tagore narrates: "When it came to giving advice on legal matters, Ramlochan was known to be "Prime Minister" of the village" (Hussain, 2026, p. 206). Chidam, realizing his mistake, prepared to tell the truth by folding hands; with tearful eyes, he cried, "My wife has done nothing wrong." Gradually, the truth began to emerge. Nevertheless, the lawyer did not believe him because the principal witness, Ramlochan, said: "I arrived at the place of occurrence soon after the incident. Witness Chidam admitted everything to me. He held on to my legs and begged me, "Please tell me, how can I save my wife? I gave him no advice, good or bad. And he (Ramlochan) narrated all that he thought he knew; in fact, he added in a few decorative touches of his own"" (Hussain, 2016, p. 210-211). Thus, this piece of Brahmin's advice is nothing but a manifestation of textual cruelty where Brahmanism is preserved through transferring guilt downward, into the weaker and the women. The brothers, being Dalits, had no other options and, being conditioned in a Brahmanical atmosphere of obedience, accepted his advice as divine counsel. The brothers, as oppressed, internalize the Brahmin oppressor's logic and enact it upon their own, which Ambedkar calls 'the rituals of displacement'.

Brahmanical Reconfiguration of Loyalty within Dalit Masculinity

An ideological mechanism within Brahmanism is where Dalit men are reorganized to sustain upper-caste hegemony through their emotional and social allegiance. Masculinity, like mastery, autonomy, and honour, is historically denied to the Dalit men within the Brahmanical social order. On the contrary, Dalit men are conditioned to adopt and reshape manhood to obedience, endurance to pain, suffering, and humiliation, and provide service to the upper-caste. Dalit men's masculinity is reconfigured in such a way that they transform their loyalty to preserve and perpetuate the Brahmanical social order. Dalit men, Guru argues, lack access to the symbolic capital of purity and authority associated with Brahmanical masculinity and are nevertheless compelled to display loyalty to it in order to survive within the caste hierarchy (Guru, 1995, p. 2549). This Brahmanical ideology destroys collective Dalit solidarity, which enhances servitude as a moral virtue. To maintain the servitude, two Dalit brothers, Dukhiram and Chidam, reject allegiance to their own suffering class and female kinship by adhering to the suggestion of Brahmin Ramlochan. Dukhiram's anger is not against the humiliation suffered by upper-caste men but instead directed at his wife, Radha. Chidam also does the same by preferring Brahmanical patriarchy, saves his brother, and accuses his wife of killing Radha. Dalit ethics emphasizes solidarity for the oppressed, but Brahmanism teaches upper-caste values of fraternity and female disposability. The act of Chidam in the story is interpreted as selfish, but applying the Dalit lens shows that it is a caste mimicry of Brahmanical patriarchy for a survival strategy. Book chapter entitled *Indian Feminism and Dalit Patriarchy*, V. Geetha writes, "A notable feature of the exploitation of Dalit has been the humiliation of Dalit men: in the course of power that upper-caste men exert over their labour, they also taunt them about their masculinity. They claim that Dalit men can never hope to protect their women, who are considered 'easy prey' by upper-caste men. Such symbolic 'emasculatation' of Dalit men results in their feeling beleaguered in specifically gendered ways, which results in their exerting prowess in their family...sanskritisation or 'jatikarana' – intensified castification- led to upper caste norms and upper-caste patriarchal practices percolation into the lower-caste ranks too" (Arya & Rathore, 2020, pp. 61-62). It shows

that both brothers are powerless in the Brahmanical social order; therefore, their anger is directed at Radha and Chandra. Thus, Brahmanical reconfiguration of loyalty of Dalit masculinity does the work of maintaining caste hierarchy through psychological and structural mechanisms, and in doing so, the real fangs of Brahmanism are often masked under moral or divine order. In another way, it can be said that Dalit men are not the structural authors of patriarchy; Brahmanical patriarchy is. Yet, Dalit men become its local enforcer through internalization, social conditioning, and aspirations for masculinity within a casteist society.

Chandra's Resistance: The Subaltern's Refusal to Speak

Reading the text through the theoretical framework of universal humanism, the silence of Chandra is voluntary, spiritual, and transcendental, symbolizing moral values such as purity, forgiveness, and womanly strength, and, in the end, achieving aestheticization of beauty and tragic catharsis. Thus, womanly restraint is idealized as universal beauty, which is what the Brahmanical-humanist aesthetic is. Sharmila Rege argues that such a universalist reading erases the material history of caste and gender and thereby turns oppression into poetry. An Ambedkarite critique would interpret this text somewhat differently. Chandra's silence is forced, violent, and socially produced muteness, which symbolizes oppression and denial of agency that challenges the moral order enforced through caste-patriarchy, and the denouement of the story is the exposure of structural injustice and voicelessness. Since language also belongs to the upper-caste, Chandra's death is not redemptive but a social consequence of a caste-patriarchal society. Thus, mainstream tradition interprets it as virtue, thereby "tends to pose a hindrance for the flourishing of gender justice for all Indian women"; the Dalit-feminist lens interprets it as a violation, where silence is transformed from an aesthetic ideal into a political symptom of exclusion (Arya & Rathore, 2020, p. 24).

Positioning Brahmanism in Tagore's Punishment

As a moral framework and an invisible oppressor, Tagore positions Brahmanism cleverly and cunningly, through which his characters' fates are governed. He tactfully and artfully embeds ideological hierarchy and Brahmanical patriarchy while ostensibly portraying a domestic tragedy of a Dalit family. Without committing direct violence, Brahmin Ramlochan's silent authority functions as the moral centre of the story, thereby legitimizing both judgment and punishment. Chidam is shown helpless while making the decision; therefore, he needs a Brahmin's approval. On the other hand, Dukhiram, "a large man with big bones and a thick nose, strong" and "indeed a rare specimen of humanity" (Hussain, 2016, p. 208), cannot raise a voice and strength against the injustice and social exploitation he suffers under the landlord. Instead, his despair is quenched by killing his wife. Therefore, this story retains Brahmin's supremacy and Dalit's inferiority. Tagore's portrayal of Chandra is a pattern echoed in Brahmanical literature as Chandra is treated merely as an object of study rather than as an agent of change capable of speaking for herself. Brahmanical ethics, when analyzed through the Ambedkarite theoretical framework, unmask the logic of violence and expose the silent tyranny portrayed in the text. Thus, Brahmanism is not named in the text but, through Tagore's art, is positioned as the invisible grammar of social tragedy.

Tagore's Caste-Bound Humanism: Reassessing the Brahmin Author's Moral Stand

An essay on Sahapedia argues that Tagore “considered caste the only rational system to prevent social destruction” (Chunder, 2018, para. 4). This notion of caste seeps into his short story *Punishment*. Injustice is exposed in the text, but its aesthetic framing neutralizes radical critique. As a Brahmin, Tagore has emotional access but not epistemic equality regarding caste oppression. Dalit humiliation and the silence of the Dalit characters of the story led them to accept inequality as a tragic inevitability. After reading this story, it can be understood that Ambedkar’s caveat regarding upper-caste reformers who, “concerned itself with the reform of the high caste Hindus Family. It consists mostly of enlightened high caste Hindus who did not feel the necessity for agitating for the abolition of caste or had not the courage to agitate for it. They fell quiet naturally, a greater urge to remove such evils as enforced widowhood... They did not stand up for the reform of the Hindu society... It did not relate to the social reform of the in the sense of the break-up of the caste system. It was never put in issue by the reformers” (Ambedkar, 2013, p. 21). The conscience of a Brahmin condemns cruelty but gives moral support to the caste hierarchy. Therefore, Tagore’s representation of Dalit lives is like compassion without consciousness, what Ambedkar says, “the consciousness that exist is the consciousness of his (high-caste Hindus) caste” (Ambedkar, 2013, p. 34). Reading this story, the privileged class or elites may get comfort, but can never get discomfort, as it never empowers the marginalized subjects. Judging Tagore from a Dalit perspective, he is more a Brahmin moralist than a revolutionary. He is never able to identify himself with Dalit characters because of his ideological stand. His emphasis is on ethical reform, not on social annihilation of caste. In this story, Tagore never mentions caste, but the society he writes about is caste-based, and he ultimately mourns its consequences. He depicted the Brahmin character Ramlochan as the voice of reason, not villainy. Injustice is portrayed beautifully through his omniscient narration, but it stops to identifying Brahmanism as its cause. Under the guise of universal humanism, Tagore keeps silent on caste; this literary echo of social silence Ambedkar wanted to break.

Tagore’s silence on caste in this story makes the text fertile for Dalit deconstruction. Thus, the Ambedkarite framework helps question, interpret, and document Brahmanical texts. Gayatri Chakrabarty Spivak’s comment on this issue is worth reading: “the Subaltern can speak only when the dominant discourse is interrupted” (Spivak, 1988, p. 285). Also, Saran Kumar Limbale opines, “When a non-Dalit writer writes about Dalit life, the experience is aestheticised rather than realized” (Limbale, 2004, p. 78). Tagore lacks the lived experiences of a Dalit. He writes about poor Dalits, their sufferings, and their deaths, but fails to interpret their world and to understand Dalit consciousness and caste oppression. Therefore, an authorial supremacy is always retained through aesthetic containment by the Brahmin writers when they write about Dalit lives.

Like every study, this study, which is entitled “The Brahmin’s Voice and the Dalit’s Silence: An Ambedkarite Reading of Rabindranath Tagore’s *Punishment*,” is not without limitations. The reverence of Tagore as a poet is not confined to Bengal alone; he is revered throughout the world. The magnanimity of his vast literary corpus is huge. An apparent reading of this article might give the impression that Tagore was a casteist who wholeheartedly practiced casteism. Some critics might claim that Tagore was not a Brahmin; he belonged to the Pirali sect. One may also argue that Tagore, in his early days, endorsed caste hierarchy in his institutions, but later he was vocal in opposing casteism. Hardly taking into consideration other major works like *Chandalika*, etc., one cannot conclude that Tagore was a casteist. Since this study interpreted the

text through the Ambedkarite theoretical framework, one might also argue that it is subject to interpretive bias due to reliance on a singular socio-cultural lens. To contextualize caste dynamics in this study, very little historical correspondence with Tagore, and no data on sociology, anthropology, or gender studies, are furnished. Therefore, this article aims to question the validity of Tagore's genealogy as Brahmin, given that the vast majority of the population knows him as a Brahmin and his stance on Casteism. Selecting a single text by Tagore is deliberate, as it would allow a deeper, more concentrated examination of caste and its implications within the narrative without diluting or digressing from the argument. To question and engage with the mainstream Tagorean scholarship, the Ambedkarite theoretical framework is applied for analysis, as it is now an established framework that provides a counterargument or interpretation foregrounding caste dynamics. Since a research article must be limited to a few pages, a close textual reading and critical discourse analysis are deliberately employed. The primary objective is to generate critical questions and enquiries for further study of Tagore's works in the light of caste in a much broader way.

Conclusion

Analyzing the story's text through Ambedkarite hermeneutics, *Punishment* becomes a microcosm of caste-hierarchical India, where Dalit men are humiliated, discriminated, and forced into violence consciously or unconsciously. Besides, Dalit women are sacrificed to restore social purity under the guise of legal justice, and thereby, reaffirms the caste-system. Since Brahmin's suggestion becomes law, they consequently become custodian of caste morality. Unlike Ambedkar and other Dalit writers, Tagore's aesthetic humanism and narrative empathy do not annihilate the structure of caste oppression, as he is not above his caste inheritance. Despite Tagore's intentions, the text becomes a document of caste historiography with a detailed portrayal of hunger, injustice, humiliation, and the Brahmin's manipulation. Readers can reclaim *Punishment* as a text of exposure rather than exaltation. A Brahmin Ramlochan speaks, but Dalit characters are silent, and in this silence Dalit subjects finally speak. Interpreting these texts using caste angles, Ambedkar's observation might encapsulate the findings: "Virtue has become caste-ridden, and morality has become caste-bound. There is no sympathy to the deserving. There is no appreciation of the meritorious. There is no charity for the needy. Sufferings as such call for no response. There is charity, but it begins with the caste and ends with the caste. There is sympathy but not for men of other caste" (Ambedkar, 2013, p. 42).

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**Performing Femininity and Becoming Woman:
A Comparative Study of Monica Ali's Nazneen in
Brick Lane and Anisah in *Love Marriage* through
Judith Butler and Simone de Beauvoir**

Nongthombam Liklaileima

PhD Research Scholar

Department of English and Cultural Studies,

Manipur University, India.

Email: liklainong@gmail.com

Abstract:

This paper explores the evolving performances of womanhood in Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* (2003) and *Love Marriage* (2022) through the theoretical perspectives of Simone de Beauvoir and Judith Butler. Drawing on Beauvoir's concept of "becoming" in *The Second Sex* (1949) and Butler's idea of gender performativity in *Gender Trouble* (1990), the study examines how Ali's female characters, Nazneen from *Brick Lane* and Anisah from *Love Marriage*, navigate patriarchal expectations, cultural boundaries, and personal desires. Both women live in societies that dictate how women should behave, yet each gradually begins to question and reshape those expectations. Nazneen's transformation from an obedient wife to an independent woman, and Anisah's journey from emotional silence to self-awareness, reveal how agency can emerge even under constraint. The analysis highlights Butler's argument that gender is "an identity tenuously constituted in time" (p. 179) and Beauvoir's claim that one "is not born, but rather becomes, a woman." (p. 293). By placing these ideas in conversation with Ali's fiction, the paper shows how the author portrays womanhood as a performance capable of change and resistance. Through small acts of defiance and self-recognition, Ali's women demonstrate that identity is not fixed but continuously evolving. Ultimately, the study argues that both *Brick Lane* and *Love Marriage* affirm the possibility of freedom within the everyday acts of women who dare to live differently.

Keywords: Monica Ali, Judith Butler, Simone de Beauvoir, gender performativity.



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Introduction

The entanglements of gender, migration, trauma, and cultural identity consistently thread through Monica Ali's fiction. Ali's debut novel, *Brick Lane* (2003), traces the life of the protagonist, Nazneen, a Bangladeshi woman who migrates to London after an arranged marriage with Chanu and grapples with the demands of patriarchy, cultural tradition, and the pressures of diasporic life. Nearly two decades later, Ali wrote *Love Marriage* (2022), a novel that revisits similar questions of gender, family, and social constraints but positions them in a more contemporary, multicultural London. Among the most striking characters in *Love Marriage* is Anisah, Yasmin's mother. As we dive into the novel, Anisah's seemingly ordinary life as a dutiful wife and mother is revealed to be shadowed by traumatic violence and a marriage that was less an act of romance than an economic transaction.

This paper will bring Nazneen from *Brick Lane* and Anisah from *Love Marriage* into critical discourse to examine how gender identity in Ali's novels is produced and constrained by cultural scripts, trauma, and social expectations. This paper contends that Nazneen and Anisah represent two modalities of female obedience. While Nazneen's obedience is cultivated through migration and cultural fatalism, Anisah's obedience emerges from sexual trauma and the perception of commodification in marriage. Both characters illuminate Judith Butler's (1988) contention that gender is not a natural substance but "a performative accomplishment which the mundane social audience, including the actors themselves, come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief" (p. 520). At the same time, they embody Simone de Beauvoir's assertion in *The Second Sex* that "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (p. 293), revealing how patriarchal structures constitute womanhood through repetition and constraint.

In this paper, these two characters – Nazneen from *Brick Lane* and Anisah from *Love Marriage* are analysed critically to demonstrate how Ali portrays the embodied consequences of gender performativity across different generational and cultural contexts. While Nazneen's limited subversions emerge through her refusal to go back to Bangladesh and her tentative independence, Anisah's story suggests both the crushing weight of silence and the faint possibility of alternative intimacies, particularly in her ambiguous relationship with Flames. So in both cases, Ali shows that the performance of gender is constantly haunted by the possibility of rupture and re-signification, even when it is constrained by trauma or tradition.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this paper rests on the intersecting ideas of Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity and Simone de Beauvoir's existential notion of becoming woman. Butler and Beauvoir write from different philosophical moments, but both challenge the perception of gender as fixed or biologically determined. They argue that womanhood is not a natural fact but a continuous process. For Butler and Beauvoir, womanhood is a performance shaped by culture, language, and power.

In her most important and famous work, *The Second Sex* (1949), Simone de Beauvoir writes the famous quote, "One is not born, but rather becomes a woman" (p. 293), which has since become the keystone of feminist theory. Beauvoir's above statement dismantles the idea that femininity is an inherent quality. Instead, it proposes that "the whole of civilisation elaborates this intermediary product between the male and the eunuch which is called feminine" (Butler, 1949, p. 293). Woman, for Beauvoir, is constructed in relation to man, where she

becomes “the other”. She is defined not by her own essence but by what patriarchy demands of her. So from this viewpoint, gender is a social role performed so persistently that it appears natural.

Decades later, Judith Butler extended and radicalized this insight in her seminal work *Gender Trouble* (1990), in which she argues that even the category of “sex” which was once thought to be purely biological, is itself a cultural construction. As Butler (1990) writes:

It would make no sense, then, to define gender as the cultural interpretation of sex if sex itself is a gendered category. Gender ought not to be conceived merely as the cultural inscription of meaning on a pre-given sex (a juridical conception); gender must also designate the very apparatus of production whereby the sexes themselves are established. (p. 11)

Butler thus blurs the line between sex and gender. She claims that both are products of discourse. According to her, systems of language, norms, and repetition teach individuals how to “be” men or women. What Butler is trying to express is that gender identity is not something we are, but something we do. It is made up of our daily actions, gestures, and ways of behaving that, when repeated over time, start to look natural, creating the illusion of a stable identity. As Butler (1990) puts it, “Gender ought not to be construed as a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts follow; rather, gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a stylized repetition of acts” (p. 179). In other words, people become “men” or “women” by doing the same kinds of things again and again, behaving according to what society expects. Over time, these repeated acts make the roles of the obedient wife, the self-sacrificing mother, or the quiet daughter seem natural, when in fact they are learned performances shaped by culture and society.

Both Beauvoir and Butler believe that womanhood is something shaped by society’s expectations. For them, womanhood is a performance that women are taught to play. However, the views of Beauvoir and Butler differ in how they see the possibility of resistance. For Beauvoir, freedom comes through awareness and action. A woman can rise above the limitations placed on her when she becomes conscious of how society defines her as “the other” and chooses to live on her own terms.

On the other hand, Butler finds resistance within the performance itself. She suggests that change does not happen by escaping gender roles but by doing them differently. She writes, “[t]his repetition is at once a reenactment and reexperiencing of a set of meanings already socially established” (Butler, 1990, p. 178). This means that by repeating gendered behaviours in new ways, women can expose how artificial those norms really are. Butler asserts that women will get liberation not by stepping outside of gender but by transforming it from within.

Thus, when we read Ali’s *Brick Lane* and *Love Marriage* from these lenses, the connection becomes evident. Both Nazneen and Anisah live in worlds that define femininity through silence, sacrifice, and endurance. Nevertheless, each of them finds small, quiet ways to resist by questioning what they have been taught to accept. Nazneen’s transformation from submission to self-definition and Anisah’s slow rediscovery of emotional warmth are not loud acts of rebellion. There are subtle shifts in how they perform womanhood. They might be small acts, but they carry great strength.

In this sense, Beauvoir and Butler’s theories help us see Ali’s women not as passive victims but as evolving selves. When these two women perform their roles with new awareness,

they begin to become “otherwise”. The smallest gesture of resistance they show whether it be a choice, a conversation, or a refusal, becomes an act of freedom.

Nazneen in *Brick Lane*: Performing the Script of Submission and Subverting it

In *Brick Lane*, Nazneen’s story begins with her mother’s quiet but haunting injunction: “Fate will decide everything in the end, whatever route you follow” (Ali, 2003, p. 16). It seems like a simple sentence; however, this statement seals her destiny long before she begins to live it. Those words become the invisible thread that binds her to a life of submission, instilling in her the belief that endurance is the only virtue for a woman. Nazneen is married to Chanu, a man much older and far more self-absorbed. Even in London, her husband always tries to maintain a space that mirrors his imagined version of ‘home’ in Bangladesh. Thus, Nazneen’s world is defined by the four walls of her London apartment and the unending rhythm of domestic routine. She cooks, cleans, and cares, all the while performing what society and her husband expect of a ‘good wife’. Nazneen’s confinement within the domestic space profoundly influences how she sees herself and her body. She appears passive, detached, and voiceless, reflecting the internalization of her restricted life. Chanu reinforces this perception when he remarks that she is “an unspoilt girl from the village” (Ali, 2003, p. 24). He further adds, “What's more, she is a good worker. Cleaning and cooking and all that. The only complaint I could make is she can't put my files in order, because she has no English. I don't complain though. As I say, a girl from the village: totally unspoilt” (Ali, 2003, p. 25). Through his words, it becomes clear that Nazneen’s value is defined entirely by her domestic abilities and submissive demeanour, showing how physical confinement extends to shape her psychological and emotional identity. Ana-Blanca Ciocoi-Pop (2019) writes that “*Brick Lane* is a solid wall of existential and narrative continuity, built by piling up the individual bricks of female experience” (p. 21).

When we examine Nazneen’s femininity by applying Judith Butler’s insight in *Gender Trouble*, we realise that her femininity is not something she simply is, but something she performs. Butler (1990) writes that “Gender ought not to be conceived merely as the cultural inscription of meaning on a pregiven sex (a juridical conception); gender must also designate the very apparatus of production whereby the sexes themselves are established” (p. 11). We see that the supposed “feminine nature” of Nazneen is thus not natural but it seems to be discursively manufactured through the repeated acts of patriarchy that define her as submissive.

Nazneen begins to transform slowly but surely. Her transformation begins when she recognizes the artificiality of these acts. Nazneen starts to see the world beyond her apartment window. As she sees the bustling London streets, the immigrants struggling to find belonging, she begins to question the script that has been given to her. When she enters into an affair with Karim, it does not become just a romantic escape; rather, it becomes an act of self-reclamation. Though it is a socially condemned act, this affair becomes a crack in the mask of obedience for Nazneen. It turns out to be her first act of self-definition, the moment she realizes that the life she has been performing can, in fact, be rewritten. Moreover, by refusing to return to Bangladesh with her husband, Nazneen finally disrupts what Butler (1990) calls “the illusion of an abiding gendered self” (p. 179). Butler (1990) reminds us that “gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, through a stylized repetition of acts” (p. 179). Nazneen’s decision towards the end of the novel, to live differently, to repeat differently, becomes her act of rebellion.

The above analysis is beautifully complemented by Simone de Beauvoir's idea in *The Second Sex*. Beauvoir (1949/2011) writes that woman is not born but "becomes", she is shaped by what society tells her she should be: "the whole of civilisation elaborates this intermediary product between the male and the eunuch which is called feminine" (p. 293). Nazneen, who was once moulded into this product of tradition, begins to shed it through experience. She moves from passivity to participation, from being acted upon to becoming the author of her own choices. Nazneen's revolution is not grand but subtle. Her revolution lies in her courage to say no to Karim, in the decision to stay back in London rather than return to Bangladesh with her husband Chanu and in the quiet assertion that her life belongs to her. "She felt that power was inside her, and she was its creator" (Ali, 2003, p. 300). She gains freedom not from rejecting her identity but from performing it differently. She still cooks, still sews, still tends to her family, but now she does all these actions with self-awareness. These deeds that once symbolised submission now begin to embody choice. So this aligns with Butler's belief that repetition holds transformative power and performing the same acts differently can entirely alter their meaning. At the end of the novel, Nazneen has undergone a transformation, not through revolution but through recognition. In her steady defiance of fate, she exemplifies the idea, shared by Butler and Beauvoir, that womanhood is not an essence to be accepted but a becoming to be lived.

Anisah Ghorami: The Obedient Wife and The Silenced Self

In the novel *Love Marriage*, Yasmin's mother, Anisah Ghorami, embodies a complex mix of obedience, repression, and quiet endurance. Anisah's life has been shaped by cultural expectations, patriarchal demands, and traumatic experiences. Anisah's life is different from her daughter Yasmin's life. While Yasmin lives in a world of relative freedom and self-assertion, Anisah lives a life of submission and sacrifice, concealed behind the illusion of a dutiful wife and mother. Her marriage to Shaokat was far from being a romantic union; rather, it was a transactional arrangement. Their arrangement was a business deal rooted in patriarchal negotiations where her trauma of being raped became a bargaining chip. After being raped before marriage, Anisah's parents paid for Shaokat's medical studies in exchange for his marrying their "damaged" daughter. "She was damaged goods. Nobody would want her" (Ali, 2022, p. 478). Anisah's family perceives her as a burden and considers her "damaged", so they arrange her marriage to Shaokat Ghorami both to rid themselves of shame and to secure financial support for Shaokat's medical studies. This situation highlights how women's bodies are treated as commodities and how patriarchal structures restrict female autonomy. Marriage became a form of atonement for something that was never her fault. Beauvoir (1949/2011) writes:

The destiny that society traditionally offers women is marriage. Even today, most women are, were, or plan to be married, or they suffer from not being so. Marriage is the reference by which the single woman is defined, whether she is frustrated by, disgusted at, or even indifferent to this institution. (p. 451)

Thus, her identity as a wife is not founded on affection or choice, but on an act of social restitution.

Judith Butler's theory of gender in *Gender Trouble* helps us build a clear framework to read Anisah's constrained femininity. Butler (1990) argues that "

...gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a stylized repetition of acts. The effect of gender is produced through the

stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and styles of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self. (p. 179)

Anisah's repeated acts of obedience are seen in her cooking, serving, praying, and maintaining silence. These acts become performative rituals through which she upholds the illusion of being the "ideal Bengali wife". Her actions, movements, and tone are the mundane repetitions that construct the "illusion of an abiding gendered self" (p. 179), precisely as Butler defines it.

Monica Ali's portrayal of Anisah also shows how "sex itself is a gendered category", as Butler (1990) states that "gender must also designate the very apparatus of production whereby the sexes themselves are established. As a result, gender is not to culture as sex is to nature; gender is also the discursive/cultural means by which "sexed nature" or "a natural sex" is produced and established as "prediscursive," prior to culture, a politically neutral surface on which culture acts" (p. 11). In the story, Anisah's womanhood becomes defined by what society says a woman should be. Society says that a woman should be pure, loyal, forgiving, and accommodating, and that is precisely what Anisah is forced to do. Her biological womanhood is immediately inscribed with patriarchal meaning. She is expected to bear shame for her sexual violation. Her rape is treated as a stain that she must wash away through obedience instead of a crime against her. She is pressured by culture and society to redeem her 'polluted' femininity through marriage and to erase her individuality and identity under domestic servitude. Her "natural" identity as a woman becomes a socially produced reality.

Additionally, Anisah's relationship with her husband, Shaokat, is not built upon emotional intimacy. In the Ghorami family, Shaokat stands as the patriarchal figure whose intellectual superiority and moral rigidity overshadow Anisah's presence. Haydor Uddin (2025) writes, "Anisah's role in an arranged marriage exemplifies the sacrifices that many women make in the name of familial and societal expectations" (p. 268). However, as the story progresses in the novel, Ali subtly introduces moments of rebellion through Anisah's developing friendly bond with Harriet Sangster. Harriet Sangster becomes a turning point in Anisah Ghorami's transformation. The relationship between Anisah and Harriet symbolises cross-cultural female connection and empowerment. Through her interactions with Harriet, Anisah begins to question traditional roles and rediscover her individuality. Anisah's later relationship with Flames, Harriet's female friend, further deepens this journey. It allows Anisah to explore emotional intimacy and self-expression beyond the confines of marriage. It further helps her reclaim the parts of herself long suppressed by her role as a dutiful wife and mother. The quiet companionship between Anisah and Flames when they cook together, share glances, and confide in each other hints at a form of emotional bond and perhaps even something deeper, a bond beyond the boundaries of heteronormative marriage. This unspoken connection between them breaks the rigid boundaries of gender and desire. Butler's (1990) question resonates here: "Does being female constitute a "natural fact" or a cultural performance, or is "naturalness" constituted through discursively constrained performative acts that produce the body through and within the categories of sex?" (p. xxviii-xxix).

Anisah's emotional connection with Flames becomes a subtle but radical gesture. It is a silent undoing of her performative identity. Through this relationship, Ali makes us see a subtle glimpse of queer potentiality that is not overtly expressed but that quietly disrupts the normativity of heterosexual marriage. Anisah's awakening happens slowly and quietly. She does

not rebel openly, but she begins to realise, deep within herself, how emotionally unfulfilled she has been. Ali portrays Anisah's journey of self-discovery through this silence. As Butler (1990) notes, "[t]his repetition is at once a reenactment and reexperiencing of a set of meanings already socially established" (p. 178). Anisah's daily service routine repeats the lessons of submission she has been taught all her life. But by the end, her bond with Flames helps her find new meaning in those same acts. The path to her self-discovery is not through rebellion, but through closeness, care, and mutual understanding.

Simone de Beauvoir's concept that woman is made "the other" in relation to man aligns clearly with Anisah's life. Anisah has always lived her life in the shadow of others: first her parents, then her husband, then her children. But Ali shows us that even this shadowed existence has light. Through Flames, Anisah glimpses another way of being where she is seen, heard, and cared for.

Through Anisah, Monica Ali sets cultural obedience and internal resistance side by side for examination. Anisah becomes both a victim of patriarchal culture and a quiet agent of transformation. Butler (1990) asserts that "gender is not to culture as sex is to nature" (p. 11), and this assertion especially relates to Anisah. We see that Anisah's gendered self is a cultural construct, performed under constraint, yet within those constraints, she begins to rewrite meaning through lived experience. From the surface, her life may appear to be governed by obedience, but underneath it lies a person, a self still yearning to be recognized, to exist beyond the repetition of norms.

Comparative Reading: Performativity, Becoming, and the Politics of Resistance

Nazneen and Anisah come from two different social worlds. While Nazneen is an immigrant woman negotiating cultural displacement, Anisah is a settled British-Asian mother. However, the journeys towards their self-discovery mirror each other in structure. Both begin their journeys as women performing prescribed femininities, but they gradually rewrite those performances through lived contradictions.

Judith Butler (1990) asks, "Does being female constitute a 'natural fact' or a cultural performance?" (p. xxviii-xxix), and this question finds dual expression in Ali's novels. In *Brick Lane*, Nazneen's gendered body is disciplined by immigrant patriarchy, while in *Love Marriage*, Anisah's body is disciplined by cultural respectability and trauma. They adopt different ways of deviating from these established and accepted constraints. Nazneen refuses to return to Bangladesh with her husband, Chanu, and Anisah develops an emotional bond with Flames. Their acts of deviation illustrate what Butler and Beauvoir both imply in their theory that transformation is possible only through awareness and repetition. Through Butler's theory of gender performativity and Beauvoir's concept of "becoming", their journeys reveal how performance can evolve into transformation, and how identity, though shaped by social control, can still be reimaged from within.

For both Nazneen and Anisah, gender is not an essence but something they have learned to act out and perform. Nazneen's quiet obedience at home and Anisah's emotional restraint highlight the same patriarchal idea that the ideal and virtue of a selfless woman lie in sacrifice and endurance, as Butler (1990) explains that gender is "an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a stylized repetition of acts" (p. 179). Nazneen's daily life of sewing, cooking, and serving mirrors Anisah's well-maintained life and role as a wife and

mother. Both have internalized femininity as service, turning social expectations into habits that eventually define their identity.

Yet, it is through small breaks in these expected roles that both women find their sense of agency. When Nazneen refuses to return to Bangladesh with her husband, and when Anisah forms emotional connections with Harriet and Flames, they quietly challenge the rules that define them. They don't completely reject their worlds, but they start to act differently — repeating the same roles with a new purpose. This reflects what Butler (1988) says "...then the possibilities of gender transformation are to be found in the arbitrary relation between such acts, in the possibility of a different sort of repeating, in the breaking or subversive repetition of that style," (p. 520) where real change happens not by escaping social norms but by redoing them in ways that reveal their fragility.

At the end of the novels, both Nazneen and Anisah show how Monica Ali's women perform and unlearn the identities society assigns them. Their gradual growth and development do not dismantle patriarchy entirely, but they unsettle the core belief of patriarchy that gender is fixed, stable, and naturally ordained. Through their acts of care, awareness, and redefinition, they embody Butler's (1990) assertion that "there is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very expressions that are said to be its results" (p. 33).

Conclusion

Through the journeys of Nazneen and Anisah, Monica Ali presents womanhood not as a fixed destiny but as something that is shaped and reshaped through life. Judith Butler's theory of performativity uncovers how gender is not stable but created through repeated actions, while Simone de Beauvoir's existentialism shows that being a woman is a process of continual becoming. Together, their ideas help us understand how Ali's female characters move from silence to self-expression and from submission to quiet resistance.

Nazneen's gradual independence and Anisah's emotional awakening show that change does not always happen through open rebellion. It can begin in the smallest shifts of everyday life, in moments when women start to act or think differently. Ali's novels reflect Butler's (1990) idea that gender identity is "tenuously constituted in time" (p. 179) and Beauvoir's belief that womanhood is something one becomes through experience and choice. In these subtle acts of courage and self-discovery, Nazneen and Anisah reveal that womanhood is not defined by biology or by society's rules. It is an ongoing process of becoming—one that allows space for transformation, growth, and freedom.

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**Congruence through 'Difference': The Conflict of Universality
in Amruta Patil's *Kari* and Sarnath Banerjee's *Corridor***

Sayonti Mukherjee
Junior Research Fellow
Department of English,
Jadavpur University, Kolkata
West Bengal, India.
Email: sayontimukherjee1@gmail.com

Abstract

Scott McCloud's assertion that comics have the potential to act as a universal language by bridging cultural and linguistic gaps raises important questions about the nature of visual communication within the graphic medium. This essay attempts to explore these questions by focusing on two graphic novels, Amruta Patil's *Kari* and Sarnath Banerjee's *Corridor*, examining how these narratives encapsulate subjective experiences by locating the characters within a broader thematic framework. It seeks to explore how these novels represent the constrained condition of living within a specific geography and culture, where the global psychogeographic space often intervenes with the porous boundary of the immediate space. It argues that these novels depict the characters' quest to transcend the confines of the tangible world. It will also interrogate how the visual tools unique to the graphic medium contribute to the portrayal of the figure of the outsider, who is constantly negotiating their identity with the ideal, and the way this 'living with difference' shapes how they make sense of the world.



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Introduction

Comics and graphic novels have evolved over the past half-century as powerful instruments of communication that engage with significant social concerns of the day. The academic community has long debated whether comics should be classified as a medium, a form, or a genre, as well as how they differ from graphic novels. McCloud (1994), however, broadens the term 'comics' to describe any work that operates within this medium. He uses the old-school label of "comic book", whereas Will Eisner (1985/2000) prefers the term "graphic novel" (as cited in De, 2017, p. 3). Graphic novels, as popularised by Eisner, refer to book-length works in this format, often characterised by their more mature and literary approach to content (p. 5).

Over the last few decades, graphic novels have emerged as a distinctive and influential medium in contemporary literature in India. These novels interrogate important questions that touch upon several sociopolitical issues, including caste discrimination, social injustice, gender discrimination, and reinterpretations of national history (Arni, 2011; Banerjee, 2004; Ghosh, 2010; Kuriyan, 2015; Patil, 2008/2021; Sajad, 2015; Vyam et al., 2011). By situating personal narratives within a broader sociocultural milieu, these works explore how individuals navigate their identities and inclusivity within an incoherent social system, offering a critical inquiry that reflects the complexities of contemporary cosmopolitan experience.

Comics as a Universal Language: The Ideal, the Edge, and the Outsider

In his famous *Understanding Comics*, McCloud notes, "As the twenty-first century approaches, visual iconography may finally help us realize a form of universal communication" (p. 58). McCloud's idea of universalism seems to stem from the premise that visual images are more easily interpreted across cultures than written or spoken language. The universality of images, in this sense, rests on the assumption that certain visual symbols and expressions can transcend cultural differences by bridging linguistic gaps. For example, a simple image of a smile or a frown is universally recognisable as a representation of happiness or sadness. Yet, while some basic human emotions might be universally understood, the interpretation of more complex icons is heavily coded by context.

This paper attempts to study how the two graphic novels, Sarnath Banerjee's *Corridor* (2004) and Amruta Patil's *Kari* (2008/2021), serve as social critiques of the normative, offering sites where multiple identities, experiences, and narratives can coexist. This paper aims to address three primary concerns through an in-depth analysis of the primary texts: (1) What kind of universalism is McCloud referring to? (2) Is universalism an inherent quality of the visual language? In other words, is there an element in the graphic medium that creates the requisite precondition for universalism? (3) If not so, can this medium aid in the representation of both congruence and difference?

While Scott McCloud's vision of comics as a universal language offers an optimistic view of the medium's potential, a careful examination of the history and tradition of visual communication reveals that the genre is invariably influenced by cultural and historical conditions. According to McCloud, an icon is a symbol or an instrument of the visual language that "represent[s] a person, place, thing or idea" (p. 47). But every icon is deeply rooted in its cultural specificity and carries with it the biases, assumptions, and meanings of the culture from which it originates. The visual language used in American comics, for instance, might not

resonate with readers from non-Western cultures in the same way. Therefore, attempting to universalise these symbols may inadvertently result in an effort that centres dominant perspectives, imposing a Eurocentric view on diverse othered cultures. This risks marginalising or misrepresenting the distinct ways visual symbols are understood and valued in non-European contexts.

Postcolonial authors often critique attempts to homogenise the literatures of the postcolonial states, such as 'Third World Literature' or 'Commonwealth Literature' by rejecting the static ideas of nationhood and looking at one's cultural identity as a dynamic process of hybridity (Ahmad, 1987; Bhabha, 1994/2004; Rushdie, 1992). Bhabha argues that contemporary culture, rather than simply producing alternative discourses, shifts the basis of international connections away from traditional national identities towards more complex cultural and political affiliations shaped by issues like race, sexuality, migration, and so on. He also contends that "it is the space of intervention emerging in the cultural interstices that introduces creative invention into existence" (p. 12). Therefore, according to Bhabha, world literature could emerge as a way to explore cultural differences and conflicts and focus on how cultures recognise themselves by projecting their own conceptions of "otherness" (p. 17).

While engaging with the concept of world literature, Auritro Majumder (2018) highlights the transnational reach of arguments by thinkers such as Tagore, Mao Sedong, and others who have underlined the centrality of the vernacular and the importance of creative human agency in social transformation (p. 13). Judith Butler, after initially rejecting the idea of 'universality' in her 1990 book, *Gender Trouble*, writes in her Preface added later in 1999, that she has come to understand how "the assertion of universality can be proleptic and performative, conjuring a reality that does not yet exist, and holding out the possibility for a convergence of cultural horizons that have not yet met" (p. xvii-xviii). While postcolonial debates have examined universalism from the perspective of nationhood, this paper seeks to redirect the debate towards the politics of inclusion and belonging.

Navigating Congruence through the Depiction of 'Difference'

Roman Krznaric (2014), in *Empathy: Why It Matters, and How to Get It*, advocates collaborative understanding through the cultivation of 'outrospection'. Rather than introspection, which is a self-oriented approach, outrospection is a way to understand oneself not by looking inward but outward, at others (p. 21). Krznaric underscores the importance of extending our perceptions through art, literature, film, and other social networks to facilitate exchange and empathy. The notion of outrospection indicates that the representation of exclusion or 'difference' can also contribute to the quest for universal congruence.

(Un)Belonging, as a theme in these novels, is intricately tied to the tension between the immediate and the extended psychescape and the way the characters constantly adjust themselves in response to the ideal. Both *Kari* and *Corridor* challenge the notion of universalism by highlighting the specificities of belonging and identity, while also recognising the shared human experiences that transcend these boundaries. In doing so, these novels not only represent congruence and difference but also encourage readers to question the assumptions underlying both.

I

Corridor by Sarnath Banerjee highlights the intricacies of the fragmented reality of living in a city and the claustrophobia of urban life that leads to anxiety and substance abuse. The novel develops around Brighu's sojourns across the cities of Delhi and Kolkata. He identifies with Ibn Battuta, a medieval Moroccan traveller who journeyed across the Islamic world. His quest to find 'answers' in the city mirrors his search for meaning amid the city's chaotic, inconsistent landscape. The protagonist navigates the city that is both a place of possibility and a site of disillusionment. The angst of the murky, misleading city is deliberately undermined by postmodern disinterest and potentially self-subversive humour. Despite the occasional nods to the local cultures, such as references to Bengalis' love for biriyani and Boroline, the vastness of the big city evokes a feeling of being lost, as the cultural continuum stretches from Connaught Place to Kolkata, Baudrillard to Reinhart, and Heisenberg to Houdini.

A similar dislocation can be traced in Amruta Patil's description of contemporary life in *Kari*. The protagonist is a queer, introverted woman living in the 'smog-city' of Mumbai. She is out of place in a heterosexual world, always alienated, always on the fringes. Her parents' disapproval causes her to feel ashamed, "In some inexplicable, definite way, I have let them down again" (Patil, p. 30). Her desire to find a place where she fits in is set against the uncompromising city. The memory of an unforgotten affair flashes in front of her everywhere she goes. The city shows no compassion, as is evident in an incident Kari recounts: a flight attendant, who regularly shared the same compartment as her, had bruises on her arms and face one day and was continuously sobbing, but no one bothered to check on her (Patil, p. 42). The city is also portrayed as unforgiving and unpredictable, as exemplified in Kari's dream in which her canoe cracks in two: "No matter where you are headed, or how nobly, you can sink without a trace" (Patil, p. 56).

II

The sense of smell plays a significant role in the characters' negotiation with the immediate physical space. Kari is perpetually haunted by the smell of the sewer: "Washing the stench off my body when I get back home is a ritual" (Patil, p. 34). It is the "smell of death" that makes Professor DVD Murthy's seven-year-old daughter run away from him (Banerjee, p. 33). He tries to get rid of this literal and figurative 'smell' through substance abuse, but even when he is intoxicated, he thinks about the end. Death, like a spectral presence, lurks ominously in his life. The temporary timelessness of his intoxication is represented by a single panel across the page and a blank background, with DVD saying, "Universal death rate, one death per person" (Banerjee, p. 35). Death is conceptualised in these narratives as the bridge connecting the finite with the infinite, the immediate experience with the transcendental reality.

For Kari, death serves as the only way of rising above the lifeless indifference of her existence. She repeatedly asserts in the novel that she is 'twice-born'. Death has subsumed her identity as she cannot detach herself from her failed suicide attempt. She draws a line between a dignified death and a humiliating life, sighing out the words: "Some people are lucky enough to be saved by the Light, no such luck for me. I was saved by a sewer" (Patil, p. 8). Kari's augmenting obsession with death is also evident in her affection for a dying woman. The relationship with Angel further complicates the interaction between death and transcendence. Very interestingly, what binds them together is an attempt to disengage themselves from suffering: "Angel has forgotten what a body feels like without pain" (Patil, p. 39). Kari's sense of escape is fuelled by her own suffering, but the transcendental element lies in the fact that

through her pain, she is trying to grasp the meaning of mortality itself: “Fear of heights is fear of a desire to jump” (Patil, p. 112). Thus, her exploration is not egotistically exclusive but an inclusive effort to make sense of the world.

III

The tension between the ideal and the real is depicted in *Corridor* through the distinction between life and cinema: “Life, mostly, is a stream of missed opportunities, anything else is cinema” (Banerjee, p. 96). Four panels are squeezed into a single row to evoke the sensation of a montage, signifying the rapid passage of time. This gap between aspiration and actual experience is also exemplified by the character of Digital Dutta, who “lives in his head” (Banerjee, p. 40). His internal world, marked by grand fantasies and intellectual pursuits, reinforces his detachment from the external life that is plagued by a dead sameness of being. His fantasies are illustrated using coloured panels in the novel. Patil also employs colour to highlight this contrast. When Kari first hears about ‘Crystal Palace’, she imagines it as an enchanting fairytale with “Floors of marble” and “ceilings of brocade” (p. 16). The panel is vibrantly rendered through the use of pink and gleaming glitters. However, on the following page is a black-and-white diagram of the bare scaffold of the building, exemplifying Kari’s sudden fall from her radiant expectations. She also criticises the ideal of universal sisterhood after being constantly relegated to the periphery by her flatmates: “This warbling Little Women camaraderie is a badge that must be painstakingly earned” (Patil, p.18). Throughout the novel, Kari’s visions are constantly disrupted by the gritty environment of the city, where the allure of an idealised existence is overshadowed by the grim vicissitudes of monotony.

Through her dreams, Kari engages in a metaphysical quest that reflects an enduring search for wholeness and fluidity. Her rejection of a fixed identity is evident when she sees herself as an aquarium shark and a little fish (Patil, p. 85). Instead of viewing Kari’s dreams as ritualistic nightmares, they can be seen as stemming from a desire to transcend the stifling space that suffocates her: “Please let me breathe” (Patil, p. 90). Bhadury (2018), in her article on queer characters in South Asian graphic narratives, observes that “Kari herself rejects the term “lesbian” as she aspires to [have] the elusive “genderless” quality...” (p. 5). These lines are also cited by Dutta (2008), who looks at *Kari* as a novel that celebrates “exploration over destination, fluidity over form” (p. 5). This fluidity is further reflected in Kari’s relationship with water: “I promised the water I’d return her favour” (Patil, p. 31). Water, in contrast to the arid city, represents Kari’s yearning for an identity and existence beyond rigid definitions. The theme of transcendence is not limited to Kari’s personal journey but extends to the narrative’s overarching exploration of space. Kari’s disconnection from both her immediate environment and the global cultural space reflects a desire to exist beyond the limitations of space and identity, beyond all confines of control. The snow globe metaphor, in which Kari imagines shattering the glass dome that traps her, is her desperate search for a way out. It suggests that Kari’s struggles are not just about escaping the physical confines of her world, but also about overcoming the psychological barriers that limit her sense of self. The fatality of the comparison hauntingly resonates with Sylvia Plath’s (1981/2023) inexorable question, “Is there no way out of the mind?”

In *Corridor*, the narrator alludes to Jean Baudrillard’s (1968) concept of “illusory wholeness,” in which the act of completing collections signifies an unending search for completeness that is ultimately unattainable (Baudrillard, p. 7). Brighu also blends the tangible with the transcendent when he states, “Prof. DVD’s world revolves around poisons, reggae and

John Keats” (Banerjee, p. 31). Keats, known for his exploration of universality and timeless beauty, becomes a figure through whom Banerjee connects ephemerality with the eternal. Chakraborty (2021), in his article on *Corridor*, observes that “[T]he quest for wholeness is not merely connected to physical or social existence. It is an eternal search for metaphysical completeness” (p. 147). The characters' pursuit of completeness, whether through relationships, art, or intellectual endeavours, reflects a desire to transcend into a metaphysical realm where true completeness is elusive. In both novels, the obsession with the unreal arises from a profound sense of disconnectedness. The characters, instead of inhabiting a liminal space, end up existing nowhere, neither in the plurality of the city nor in the comfort of the ideal.

Towards the end in *Corridor*, a panel shows Brighu at his desk sketching himself, representing the artist looking at himself through his art (Banerjee, p. 107). The metatextual elements in these novels are crucial in understanding how the medium of comics emerges as a spatial outlet, reflecting the role of art in life. These novels thus provide a platform for an interconnection between the reader and the artist, as the city is no refuge: “In this city, no one talks” (Patil, p. 42). Both Patil and Banerjee employ a self-referential technique that not only blurs the line between art and life, but also accentuates this connection. In doing so, *Kari* and *Corridor* highlight the medium's potential to offer a unique, introspective space that challenges and contributes to the understanding of both art and existence.

Conclusion

Gloria Steinem, in an interview with Maria Shriver, observes, “Every social justice movement that I know of has come out of people sitting in small groups, telling their life stories, and discovering that other people have shared similar experiences” (Shriver, 2011). Similarly, Frantz Fanon's (1952/2021) insight in *Black Skin, White Masks*, that “it is utopian to try to ascertain in what ways one kind of inhuman behavior differs from another kind of inhuman behavior” (p. 67), suggests that despite having varied expressions, human struggles can share a commonality. At the same time, Fanon notes that oppression can take multiple forms, underscoring the challenge of comparing diverse experiences of marginalisation. While McCloud's vision of comics as a universal language is appealing, it is more accurately understood as an ideal rather than a reality. Although not inherently Eurocentric, it carries the risk of becoming so.

In both *Kari* and *Corridor*, the characters' out-of-placeness is not merely a thematic concern but a structural element in the narrative. The fragmented panels, the use of urban landscapes as metaphors, and the interplay between text and imagery all contribute to a depiction of contemporary life as a constant negotiation between aspiration and reality. As the world becomes increasingly interconnected, the role of graphic novels in representing the diverse experiences of (un)belonging will continue to grow. These works remind readers that, while the ideal of a universal language may be elusive, the power of a medium lies in its ability to foster a deeper understanding of the human condition, in all its complexity and contradiction.

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Subaltern to 'Signora': Feminist Factors in Binodini Dasi's Autobiography *My Story*

Moumita Bhattacharjee

PG student

Department of English

University of Calcutta

West Bengal, India.

Email: moumitabhattacharjee2004@gmail.com

Abstract:

Binodini Dasi's lifelong contribution to the rise of Bengali theatre and the beginning of the Bengal renaissance has been deliberately subjected to historical amnesia. Her mentor, Grishchandra Ghosh, whom she had requested to edit her maiden attempt at writing an autobiography, ridiculed her efforts, equating the manuscript to 'mad black scrawls' (Binodini, 1998, p. 31). This paper critically examines how Binodini Dasi's autobiography, *My Story*, reaches its crescendo of feminist resistance by highlighting the meticulous strategies she adopts to legitimize an alternate femininity. My endeavour in this article will be to present Binodini Dasi not merely as a victim of social constraints but as an empowered individual who navigates and subverts the expectations and attributes imposed upon her, thereby contributing to a richer understanding of feminism and gendered defiance in historical and literary contexts.



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Email: confluence.sjgc@gmail.com

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The primary reason behind the existence of feminism is to acknowledge the diverse experiences of women and to highlight the much-overlooked aspect of humanism. Yet a vastly misinterpreted segment of feminist criticism tends to generalise feminist texts under categories of common issues they address. But to put Sappho's ideology in the same chart as Mary Wollstonecraft's is the most anti-feminist agenda feminism can preach. For the unlettered, underprivileged, ultimate subaltern Binodini, radical feminism was more alien than the dream of having a family. When the eminent feminist Simone de Beauvoir was having a lovely romance with Sartre, Binodini was thrown out onto the streets by Gurmukh Roy's (her benefactor) family after his death. In 1941, when Virginia Woolf died teaching women the comfort of having a room of their own, Binodini died a lonely, crippled woman in her very own house. The very same year, Elaine Showalter was born with the future notions of the 'female', 'feminine', and 'feminist' (Showalter, 1979, p. 2) authors, while Binodini in her lifetime had belonged to much of all three criteria. Her autobiography, *My Story*, defies, in its own exceptional way, the gender difference that shapes the genealogy of the socio-cultural history of Bengal. Many critics have refused to consider her life writing as a social text, as she has been viewed as one of the many women being trained by the Bengali upper classes to become a de facto face of ethnic identity that rejects the colonial influence upon culture. However, a critical reading of the autobiography clearly reveals that the essence of the self has in no way been curtailed to present a national identity. Rather, Binodini vehemently opposes the idea of refashioning herself at the insistence of outsiders. Her refashioning of the self happens according to her own will, and its gradual progress can be traced throughout her writing. Her criticism is brief, as if a few words would suffice to shun off all unpleasantness labelled upon her name. Such confidence exuded by a woman not belonging to the upper classes urges us to re-examine the aspects of cultural identity that contradict her identity as a feminist libertarian. For Binodini, the act of writing and performing a violation of the dictates of feminine respectability becomes an instrument of self-expression and emotional autonomy.

Autobiographies written by women are often accused of being loosely structured and aesthetically unappealing because of their overly emotional narratives. This accusation can be doubled for a woman like 'Nati' Binodini, who writes from a social position of absolute humiliation and ostracization. In nineteenth-century Bengali aristocratic society, the term 'Nati' (a publicly dancing woman) was a derogatory attribute assigned to a woman of loose morals, alias a prostitute who deceitfully acts (employs 'nataka') to be a man's lover and caregiver for her own benefit. The very title of her autobiography then becomes an act of dismantling the socially inherent, sexual allegations thrown on her and restoring her discourse to be unblemished and acceptable to the predominantly male readers. This endeavour is supported by her acknowledgement that women's education is the force of moral upliftment, regardless of one's social standing: 'Even though I was a despised prostitute, I had received higher education, and I hated deception and untruth from the core of my heart' (Binodini, 1998, p. 82). While Bengali aristocratic female autobiographers employed more artistic titles, such as *Jiboner Jhorapata* (The Scattered Leaves of my Life) or *Janaika Grihabadhar Diary* (The Diary of a Housewife), Binodini's *My Story* demands no layered connotations. It is a simple yet firm establishment of her narrative, being uniquely hers and hers alone. Manada Devi, in the preface to her *Autobiography of an Educated Prostitute*, stressed the same fact:

I'm a sinner, reproached, not worthy of fame - hence no nobleman has spoken of the story of his life as honestly as I can and am speaking of. (Devi, 2024, p. 1)

Amidst the stage, society, and surroundings that trivialised her life itself, for Binodini to clarify her life-writing as influence-free, is a bold claim indeed. The deconstruction of her past and the reconstruction of the self unfold through a series of facts and their subtle, almost indirect, castigation, to portray her as an enigma whose identity transcends all binaries. To the patriarchal society, the act of a woman writing an autobiography was equivalent to undressing in public. Binodini very strategically avoids such probable comments as in the preface she writes: '...the anguish of the heart can be only comprehended within oneself' (Binodini, 1998, p. 49), casting a semi-transparent screen between her and the world where whatever she edits and projects is seen. She further utilises this mysterious appearance to intensify the already intense fanbase she had, as in 'The First Story' of her autobiography, she reveals her residential address to both assert the height of success she has reached, and to let her admirers know exactly where to find her confidently. Whereas conventional autobiographies begin by tracing the ancestry, Binodini foregrounds the absences in her life to sketch the trajectory of her achievements. She weaponizes her deficiencies to become the triggering energy behind her growth. Binodini, who enters the stage with a salary of ten rupees, later, in *My Life as an Actress*, says that the five thousand rupees once offered by a nobleman was a 'paltry sum' (Binodini, 1998, p.142) and elaborates: 'I have once or twice had access to fifty thousand rupees' (Binodini, 1998, p. 142). Binodini transforms women's antagonized emotionality into the finest sensibility for literature and acting that enables her to merge her psyche to the self of any character, to the saturated point of enacting negative capability or vanishing point in Renaissance perspectival art: 'In order to experience as many bhavas as possible, I kept my mind constantly occupied, living in the world of imagination' (Binodini, 1998, p. 81). The struggle to elevate herself in the social ladder indicates that patriarchal interpellation could not dismiss Binodini as a powerless object of male chauvinism. To the public eye, she becomes the ignoble and the noble, the fallen but the victor, the fractured yet an achiever nonetheless.

Binodini's resistance to patriarchal structures and norms operates on multiple levels. The countless examples of how elite, eminent male figures were desperate to make her their mistress, logically invert the gendered asseveration of seduction imposed upon the 'Nati'. Putting herself as an example before the prejudiced society, she redefines prostitution –

It may be that there are some who, of their own accord, plunge themselves into darkness and clear the path of hell. But there are many who are taken in by the artfulness of men and trusting in them are doomed to carry an everlasting stigma and bear the pain of unending hell. Who are all these men? Are there not some among them who are respected and adorned in society? (Binodini, 1998, p. 104-105).

Equally, she debunks the class binaries, questioning the basis of the status quo. The stark difference between Binodini, who sold her body to Gurmukh Roy to assist theatrical social reform despite growing up in abject poverty, and the wealthy family that gave away fifteen-day-old, pungent sweets of funeral charity to her family during their days of ultimate misfortune, is enough to expose the hypocrisy of aristocracy. Compared to the ungrateful behaviour she received from the upper class, the gratitude of Ganga Baiji (Binodini's first music teacher) and the humility of the nameless female neighbour towards Binodini's family during their toughest

times celebrate the moral purity of the downtrodden. Binodini recounts the couple who were not married yet living together in their house of the 'outcast', where the rules of the standard world are suspended. But in the respectable society, the married 'Babu'[s]' having multiple mistresses was the legal standard which she herself had been subjected to. Furthermore, thespian artistry becomes her tool for deflating the 'Bhadromohila-Barangona' (Elite woman-Public woman) binary. Despite being an unlettered, non-Brahmin, unpolished woman, she could gracefully enact heavily Sanskritized characters to such a realistic extent that to her audience, the actor Binodini would morph into the characters she had been playing. 'I had no talent, nor was I well educated then, nor could I sing well' (Binodini, 1998, p. 68); yet, she could gracefully utter the jaw-breaking Old Bengali pronunciations and dialogues of female characters who were princesses, queens, or belonged to the hierarchical summit. But Binodini's reality was far removed from the glorious lives of Cleopatra, Pramila from *Meghnadbach Kanya*, Monorama from *Mrinalini*, Ayesha and Tilottama from *Durgeshnandini*, Sita from *Sitar Bonobas*, Britannia from *Palashir Juddho*, etc. But she was a master in art of 'split[ting] oneself into two' (Binodini, 1998, p. 72), both on stage and in reality, casting a persistent sense of amazement about the fact that she can enter these 'lofty' roles and recreate them in a manner that seemed not simply realistic, but uplifting even to the refined taste of the male intelligentsia. Among the numerous examples, three stand out in particular. Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, upon seeing Binodini's performance in his play *Mrinalini*, comments: 'I had created Manorama's character only in a book. It had never occurred to me that I would see her manifested in flesh and blood.' (Binodini, 1998, p. 81). After a period of recession, when Binodini's consecutive performances led to the National Theatre being Housefull every day, its proprietor Pratapchand Johuree remarked: 'Binod has achieved the impossible' (Binodini, 1998, p. 77). Born a fallen woman, treated as a fallen woman, and dying with no less pain than that of a fallen woman, to the exclusive newspapers as 'The Statesman', this fallen woman becomes 'The Flower of the Native Stage' and the 'Signora'. The 'Barangana' not only wears the cape of 'Bhadromahila' but also ensures the public validates it with claps and cheering. She counter politicises the politics of representation as in one instance where she talks of Late Sharatchandra Ghosh's fatherly affection for her, she writes: 'I doubt if he had a daughter of his own, whether she would have enjoyed greater love' (Binodini, 1998, p. 71). What she tried to establish is that if a marginalised woman like Binodini, who has no paternal lineage to boast of, can receive equal care as an elite, legitimate woman, then the position of the fallen and the privileged can be perceived as interchangeable.

Against the critiquing agenda of the male-dominated readership, Binodini opts for multiple strategies to legitimise her discourse. Apart from the numerous self-scrutinising adjectives, such as 'unfortunate', 'despicable', 'foolish' that she attributes to herself, her epistolary narrative is addressed to an anonymous male listener whom she calls 'Mohashoy' (Master), to strengthen the necessity and validity of her storytelling. Much like Rassasundari Devi, Binodini too employs a religious framework and God's indiscriminatory grace to invisibilize the lines between the sinner and the saint. In the preface, she states

Almighty God ... has granted the great and the small, the wise and the ignorant, the power to experience joy and sorrow ... Pain and consolation.
(Binodini, 1998, p. 49)

Comparing the stage to the shrine of goddess 'Lakshmi', she advocates for theatre being the institution that brings women's monetary stability. She uses terms like 'Bhava' (sense) and 'Rasa'

(spirit) to present acting as a spiritually illuminating force that justifies the professional limelight she enjoyed against the enquiry and disdain of patriarchy. Through the legendary performance of *Chaitanyaleela*, she could portray herself as divinity incarnate, not only to the common mass but also to the saint SreeRamkrishnaParamhansa. Although Girishchandra Ghosh credits the 'religious heart of the Hindu'(Chatterjee,2007,p.185) for such success, Binodini's transvestitism and sheer will power could minutely capture the 'devbhava'(divine essence) of a gender percolative character like Shree Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. Throughout the autobiography, except for a very few instances, her resilience, 'resourcefulness', beauty, and brilliance are revealed indirectly through the observations of those around her. For example, Binodini recalls her first teacher remarking: 'This girl is sure to perform well as Hemlata'(Binodini,1998, p 67). The rapidity of her advancement towards excellence has been brought out through comparison with other esteemed actresses. The incident in which Kadambini, a renowned actress and much senior to Binodini, slaps Binodini out of jealousy and insecurity proves that she, even as a mere child, was a threat to others' fame. Her magnetic skills to attract a scale of viewership never attracted before, made her an economical weapon, as Sharatchandra Ghosh says, 'I would suffer losses if I let go of her'(Binodini 76) when Girishchandra Ghosh wanted to appoint Binodini for his own theatre.

One modern feature of feminist criticism is its exploration of alternative femininities, redefining women's experiences and perspectives. Yet Binodini, in a nineteenth-century Bengali society that was progressive only for men, provides a counter-documentation of the female code of conduct. In 1885, Krishnabhabini Dasi published India's first women's travelogue, *A Bengali Lady in England*, recording her experiences as a middle-class adult lady, accompanying her husband abroad. But Binodini's *My Story* challenges the separate spheres theory as she, despite being a minor and a pauper, travels around India professionally as an earning, independent woman, transgressing the boundary of the 'Ghar'(Home). The confines of the home percolate into the freedom of the world. Although her entry onto the stage did not happen on her own accord, the theatre still becomes the space and place through which she asserts her agency. Even when she received her master's proposal of a handsome allowance, but on the condition that she would act without salary, she refuses to sacrifice financial independence over temporal luxury: 'I had always worked for money'(Binodini, 1998, p. 82). She rigidly departs from the National Theatre after being refused her rightful pay. On being asked not to be so 'difficult', Binodini doesn't hesitate to demand the worth of her skills: 'I want a higher salary . . . Otherwise I shan't work'(Binodini, 1998, p. 83). Whereas, even affluent women hardly spoke up against domestic labour, Binodini fearlessly resisted the physical and mental exploitation she went through. Performing with injuries after falling from a horse, playing so many as seven roles in a single play, unethically made to play the character of some absent co-actor and lastly, being convinced to commodify her body for the establishment of the Star Theatre (initially to be named 'B-Theatre' but later changed to avoid controversy)-Binodini's occupational slavery was not merely circumstantial but a planned betrayal. In mid-nineteenth-century London, many English actresses were becoming managers or part-owners of theatre companies. But even the slightest possibility of Binodini occupying an official position of any kind was made impossible by those she blindly trusted. Growing up with a traumatic past in a disturbed home, she found a family in the theatre groups she worked with, where she was pampered, loved, given gifts, and provided with necessities. She mentions: 'I had become like the youngest child in a

family'(Binodini,1998,p.79). The fact that the conspiracy of these very elders and mentors led to her coerced departure from the theatre for life wounded Binodini deeply. She testifies, 'I wondered afterwards, was all their love and affection only a show of words in order to get some work out of me?' (Binodini, 1998, p. 90). In the very autobiography, final portions of which were rejected to be serially published in public newspapers and journals for the 'Bhadromahila' class, she exceeds the minimal agency of the genteel class of women through outrageously, scandalously being herself in a censoring community.

My Story exudes a textured sense of dedication, the untiring industry, the erasure of her unworthy self, the rigorous disciplines of body and intellect that were necessary to embody the dramatic conflicts, the sentiment, the devotional fervor that would be the very soul of Binodini Dasi's self-representation. While the eminent, prominent autobiographies of Gandhi and Tagore applicate and replicate the central theme or reason behind their narrative to make those relevant, Binodini valiantly announces: 'The talented, the wise and the learned write in order to educate people, to do good to others, I have written for my own consolidation' (Binodini, 1998, p. 107), jeopardizing the very genre of autobiography women are debarred from. Binodini's resistance and transcendence focus more on manifestation rather than critiquing, providing a non-extremist yet empowering form of feminism. The feminist factors are more colourful in the very existence of Binodini Dasi rather than her autobiography, which captures only a fragment of the shades of her personality. While in the suffocating domain of everlasting misogyny, *My Story* remains a feverish ramble of 'mad black scrawls'(Binodini, 1998, p. 31), to the homely warmth of the universal sisterhood, Binodini Dasi and her words inspire the immemorial revolt against homogenic historical amnesia.

Out of the huts of history's shame
I rise
Up from a past that's rooted in pain
I rise. (Angelou,1978)

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Women through the Eyes of Men: Evolution of the Portrayal of Female Figures by Their Male Creators

Tandrima Das

Guest Faculty

Department of English

Mahatma Gandhi University

Purba Medinipur, West Bengal, India

Email: tandrimaofficial25@gmail.com

Abstract

The portrayal of female characters by male authors has long been a contentious area in gender studies. Patriarchal conventions have perpetuated an asymmetric power relationship between men and women in society, leading to an imbalance in the ratio of male to female authors in literature. Consequently, female representation has been somewhat limited and unsatisfactory throughout history. As a counter to this, a course of feminist criticism emerged, in which critics like Simone de Beauvoir and Kate Millett argued that the perspective of male authors towards their female creations has been outrightly problematic. This paper, therefore, seeks to follow the approach of these feminists and analyse various female portrayals in the hands of writers who happen to be men, beginning with the ancients and extending to the moderns. The aim is to trace whether there has been any evolution in the depiction of female characters in male-authored texts and, if so, how significant these transformations are.



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Email: confluence.ssjgc@gmail.com

Keywords: patriarchy, subjugation, portrayal of women, empathy, empowerment.

Since antiquity, women have been scrutinised and disregarded under the purview of the societal conventions dominated by patriarchy. Until the 19th century, women were not allowed to write publicly. In fact, they were disallowed from going to school. Owing to this fact, a majority of writers in the literary canon have been observed to be males. As philosophers and critics across the centuries have already noted that literature reflects society, the female figures in literature, too, have been, with few significant exceptions, mostly and unabashedly relegated to an inferior status. It was only in the 1970s that, during the second wave of feminism, female critics like Simone de Beauvoir and Kate Millett scrutinised these texts through an approach which came to be known as ‘phallogocentric criticism’, that according to Fiona Talon (2006) “sought to expose the masculine bias of the works” (p. 599). This paper, therefore, will follow the path that Kate Millett (1970) takes in her seminal work, *Sexual Politics*, to analyse the structures in male-authored literature that “re-created sexual inequalities and cemented the patriarchal values of the society” (Talon, 2006, p. 599). At the same time, it will also explore those texts by male writers in which women have been depicted with utmost empathy and care and not diminished as a “second sex” (Beauvoir, 1949/2010, p.2). This way, the paper aims to give a comprehensive picture of how women have been perceived through the eyes of their male creators, in the face of patriarchal constructs, over the years. To delineate the journey of female portrayal, it is pertinent that the analysis begins with texts, as early as Homer’s *The Iliad* (n.d) and Vyasa’s *The Mahabharata* (n.d.). Being epics, these texts have no lack of grandiose. They celebrate valour, courage, and strength. However, the portrayal of women in these is quite problematic. Although characters like Helen and Draupadi exercise a fair share of authority, it is undeniable that they are still objects of lust and pleasure for men. In *The Iliad* (2003), the tradition of women being the ‘prizes of the war’ has been depicted in a significantly nonchalant manner. In Book 3, when the Trojans and Greeks advance to battle, Paris proposes to have single combat with Menelaus and says, “the one who wins and proves himself the better man can take all property and woman home” (lines 71-73). In Book 1, even a fight ensues between Achilles and Agamemnon over Briseis, a Trojan girl who had been presented as a ‘prize’ to Achilles. The root of the conflict is that Agamemnon, after being threatened by Apollo, had to return his own war prize, Chryseis, and as compensation for his loss, he seizes Achilles’ prize. Claude Levi-Strauss in *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* (1969) suggested that, as women possess the ability to bear children, they were considered “supreme gifts” (p. 54) in “primitive societies” (p. 54). Elevating them to the position of unparalleled importance, such customs instantly pulled them down by commodifying them as agents of reproduction that cannot be merely given away but have to be ‘compensated’ (p.54) with another.

Another very chauvinistic notion stems from epics like these that hold that ‘the reason behind every war is always a woman’. In *The Iliad*, again, the ten-year-long Trojan War breaks out between the Greeks and the Trojans, when Queen Helen, the wife of the Greek king, Menelaus, is apparently abducted by the Trojan prince, Paris. However, it becomes very clear from the onset that the jilted Menelaus, along with his brother, Agamemnon, the King of Mycenae, does not declare war against the Trojans because of his immense love for his wife; rather it was to avenge his wounded pride due to the fact that a man’s honour has always been intrinsically linked to the women he is related to. On the other hand, *The Mahabharata* depicts the war of Kurukshetra fought between the Pandavas and Kauravas. When the Pandavas lose a game of dice, ‘chausar’ against the Kauravas, according to the mentioned rules, they lose all their royal

titles, possessions, and become slaves to the latter. Consequently, Draupadi, the wife of the Pandavas, became their slave by default. Hence, the Kauravas, in order to humiliate the Pandavas further, vow to forcefully undress Draupadi in front of the whole court, because of the same reason that a man's honour lies in that of the women in his family, especially his wife. What is noteworthy here is how Draupadi is never given the autonomy to choose whether to gamble herself into the game. She is dragged by hair into the court while she screams and begs to be spared as she is menstruating at that point, but her cries are given a deaf ear by her husbands, as they are apparently bound by the rule of righteousness and the other men who are drunk in their lust and vengeance. Although the Pandavas swear to avenge Draupadi's public disrespect by declaring the great war or the 'Dharmayuddh', yet it is quite obvious that more than her honour, they are more inclined to avenge the humiliation of themselves.

Later, in the didactic essays of Francis Bacon, we again find a similar misogynistic approach in the advice that he gives to his readers. He portrays women as objects of distraction in a man's life. And cautions boys against "quarrels" as "they are commonly for mistresses" (Bacon, 1597/1908, p.81). It is interesting how, while being taught, teachers to date suggest their pupils not to consider Bacon's essays in the contemporary context, as those were meant for aristocratic young boys of the seventeenth century only. More striking is the case of John Milton, who in his magnum opus, *Paradise Lost* (1674), leaves no stone unturned to ensure Eve's inferiority to Adam, even in their unfallen state. During his era, when intellect was considered to be superior to any other faculty, he relegated Eve to a status whereby she is merely a narcissistic object of beauty and has to submit to Adam, who, ostensibly, possesses "wisdom, which alone is truly fair" (line 491). He draws a clear distinction between them, writing:

Not equal, as their sex not equal seemed;

For contemplation he, and valour formed;

For softness she, and sweet attractive grace; (Milton, 1674, lines 296-298)

Some critics argue that these descriptions are not really Milton's, but they are through the eyes of Satan. So, here Satan is the one who is misogynistic and not Milton. However, this does not seem like a plausible defence.

The Restoration comedies like William Congreve's *The Way of the World* (n.d.) and George Etherege's *Man of Mode* (n.d.), for that matter, portray the position of women in the contemporary society, afflicted by promiscuity, adultery, cuckoldry, and the mercenary outlook of life. Women of the Restoration era were financially and socially dependent on men completely, so their only way of stability and a better way of life was through marriage with an affluent man. Thus, the question of love and chemistry became secondary, leading to flirtatious but well-to-do men like Mirabell and Dorimant to be popular among ladies and women like Arabella, Millamant, and Harriet having to comply with such men in order not to turn into a fortuneless spinster. This is what Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* (2010) advocates against. She champions financial independence for women so that they are able to break away from the 'vassalage' (p. 29) of being a man's wife or mistress whose future prospects are tied to the man's financial support and so his whims.

Historically, women in literature written by men have mostly been restricted to the extremes of stereotypical portrayals of either the 'angel in the house' or the 'fallen woman'. During the nineteenth century, this kind of portrayal became even more prominent. In *The Madwoman in the Attic*, Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar (2000) pick on this regressive aspect

in the Victorian novels which defined women bound within the domestic space as the 'angel in the house' (p. 17) and juxtaposed them with women who attempted to transgress the domestic threshold and depicted them as 'monsters' (p.17) or 'fallen'. We find this dichotomy in the female characterisation in Thomas Hardy's novels. Even though he explored the aspect of women's helplessness and predicament in the male-dominated society, yet the treatment of his female protagonists says a lot about the contemporary outlook on women. In his novel *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886), the protagonist, Henchard, commits the grievous act of selling his wife in a drunken whim. Henchard's wife, Susan, has been depicted as a meek, unassuming woman who is overly concerned with propriety. She is the epitome of the 'angel in the house', whose dignity is violated, and so, Henchard has to face suffering by being abandoned by the world and dying alone. On the contrary, in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891), tragedy in the life of the protagonist, Tess, initiates after she is raped by the dissolute Alec d'Urberville, resulting in her pregnancy out of wedlock, damaging her and her family's reputation irredeemably. It is remarkable how Tess, despite having no fault of her own, becomes a 'fallen woman'; thus, here she, unlike Susan, has to face dishonour and neglect of society. It is interesting to note the similarity in the ending that both Henchard and Tess receive at the hands of Hardy. Despite there being a striking difference in the reason behind their turn of fate, Henchard brings it upon himself, while Tess is subjected to it by a lecherous man, yet Hardy treats the end of these two characters, i.e., death, with a similar piteous temperament.

Despite the abundance of patriarchal sentiments in the male authors, the society was never devoid of such authors who were not only able to recognise women in their true potential but were also gutsy enough to call out the toxic norms of patriarchy. These writers went against the grain and depicted powerful female characters, advocating women's empowerment. A few of these authors even belonged to a time, much before the concept of feminism came into being; they may be referred to as 'proto-feminists' as they anticipated modern feminism. Such writers include Geoffrey Chaucer, William Shakespeare, Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, and others. Chaucer, in his *The Canterbury Tales* (n.d.), includes the character of the Wife of Bath, who has had five husbands and thus considers herself an expert on marriage. This piece provides an insight into the role of women in the Late Middle Ages and throws light on tabooed topics such as women's libido and polygamy. Although few of Shakespeare's plays, like *The Winter's Tale* (n.d) and *Othello* (n.d), have been treated with patriarchal temperament with the portrayal of characters like the jealous and distrustful Leontes and Othello, respectively, who either sends his wife to jail or kills her in rage, his other plays have some of most strongly portrayed women, like Lady Macbeth. Unlike the contemporary trend of portraying women as timid and submissive characters who detest violence, Lady Macbeth in *Macbeth* (n.d) not only instigates her husband to kill King Duncan in order to become king himself, but also attempts to commit the crime herself. Even in poems like Robert Browning's 'My Last Duchess' (1842), the horrors of an extreme patriarchal outlook, in which women are considered as possessions rather than fellow human beings, have been highlighted. Browning, in his poem, has pondered upon the practice of 'honour-killing', which was a prevalent tradition during his time and has become recurrent in South Asian countries in modern times. The Duke, apparently a dotting husband, unwittingly reveals his true nature as an extremely jealous and possessive one, while describing a portrait of his dead wife –

The depth and passion of its earnest glance,

But to myself they turned (since none puts by
The curtain I have drawn for you, but I) (Browning, 1842, lines 8-10)

He further exposes his chauvinism by disapproving of her affable nature and finally admits to having killed her -

. . . Oh, sir, she smiled, no doubt,
Whene'er I passed her; but who passed without
Much the same smile? This grew; I gave commands;
Then all smiles stopped together. (Browning, 1842, lines 43-46)

Fast-forwarding to the twentieth century, authors such as Federico Garcia Lorca and Gabriel Garcia Marquez take forward the issue explored by Browning and portray the rigid patriarchal conventions in the societies of Spanish Andalusia and Latin America. In Lorca's *Blood Wedding* (1933) and Marquez's *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* (1981/1996), the theme of honour killing for the sake of upholding the family's prestige has been explored. The Bride in the former piece and Angela Vicario in the latter both are denied their right to have sexual emancipation and are forced to conform to the societal expectation of marriage, motivated by financial prosperity and the prospect of carrying the bloodline forward. Due to the pragmatic and materialist outlook towards human relationships, Leonardo and the Bridegroom in *Blood Wedding* and Santiago Nasar in *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* become the victims of these illogical conventions and eventually lose their lives. As enumerated, it is evident that since time immemorial till the present day, patriarchal conventions and attitudes continue to command the society and thus the realm of literature, despite the advancements in thought that mankind has observed throughout centuries.

Time and again, progressive men have proved their spirit of solidarity towards women against the irrational conventions of patriarchy. In an era of the Renaissance in Bengal, when the concept of Feminism or women's emancipation and empowerment was non-existent, men like Ram Mohan Roy and Vidyasagar stood for the rights of women against social evils like 'sati', child marriage, and widowhood. Authors and artists such as Rabindranath Tagore, Henrik Ibsen, G.B. Shaw, Harold Pinter, Mahesh Dattani, Satyajit Ray, and others have over and over again presented us with strong female characters or have portrayed them with utmost nuance, defying the patriarchal stereotypes. While women were mostly considered to be emotional beings, dependent on men, devoid of any rational mind to make individual choices, Tagore, Ibsen, and Pinter were of varied opinions and saw these qualities as their strength rather than weaknesses. G.B. Shaw, in his seminal play *Pygmalion* (1916), champions a woman's right to exercise her own agency through the portrayal of Eliza. He does not let Eliza remain in the shadow of Higgins as his prized possession, but gives her a dignified closure where she marries the man of her choice. Tagore's Labonno in *Shesher Kobita* (1929), epitomises a New Woman who asserts her pragmatic mind rather than being overwhelmed by emotions while choosing her husband when she realises that the love of her life, Amit, can never give her the emotional stability that a woman needs. Similarly, Mrinal from 'The Wife's Letter' (1914/2000) establishes her authority of choice to leave her husband's house when she realizes how narrow-minded and heartless they are towards the daughters-in-law of the family. Ibsen's Nora from *A Doll's House* (1879/1998) and Pinter's Ruth from *The Homecoming* (1965) choose a similar fate by claiming their individual rights to choose to live on their own terms. Mahesh Dattani's *Bravely Fought the Queen* (2003/2006) and again Tagore's 'The Exercise-Book' (n.d./2000), on the other hand, delineate how the patriarchy operates to stunt the female growth of any form. While Dattani uses the symbol of the 'bonsai

plant' (p. 15) in his play to depict the systematic crippling of female growth characterised through Dolly and Alka, Tagore symbolises intellectual transgression through Uma's exercise book, which is wiped out by her husband, Pyarimohan, when he seizes it from her. The authorial voice, thus, ironically retorts –

Pyarimohan had an exercise book too, filled with barbed essays expounding his elaborate theories. But there was no benefactor of humankind to seize that book and destroy it. (Tagore, 2000, p. 50)

Another prominent figure, Satyajit Ray, cannot be missed to be mentioned when speaking of a man's perspective of his female characters. Although not in the capacity of a writer, his contribution to the poetic portrayal of assertive, determined, and empowered women characters on the silver screen has to be given its due credit. He was at some point severely criticised as anti-feminist for the absence of any female figure in the *Feluda* and the *Gupi Bhagha* series. However, it seems that these criticisms have been made by those who are not really acquainted with his complete oeuvre. His films like *Apur Sansar* (1959), *Devi* (1960), and *Mahanagar* (1963), amongst others, have strong characters such as Aparna, Doyamoyee, and Arati, who are the quintessential feminine figures like Milton's Eve, yet they do not conform to the social exceptions. Aparna, in *Apur Sansar*, cooks for her poor husband, Apu, serves him when he returns from office, fans him while he eats, and yet coyly enjoys when Apu sleepily fans her back while she eats; she does not hurriedly tell him to go to bed, as he might be tired. These subtle depictions prove to be a powerful nudge on the age-old patriarchal conventions that promote the notion of an 'ideal wife' who prioritises husbands' comfort over everything else. In *Devi*, Doyamoyee, even while being fully aware that staying back at her in-laws would bring havoc in her life, as she is believed to be the incarnation of Goddess Kali by her father-in-law, she refuses to leave with her husband, fearing that her departure might cause harm to the villagers and her family. What is most interesting here is that her husband, who is an educated, enlightened man, does not rebuke her superstition or even force her; he respects her choice. This dignified portrayal of marital relationship feels like a breath of fresh air against the other regressive ones in which the husband is depicted as a godly-figure who has to be revered and not questioned, let alone refused.

In contemporary society, where the trend of spreading hate against the opposite gender has escalated exponentially, it is very important that we analyse things rationally and not impulsively. Rejecting Homer and Milton for their anti-feminist portrayal and entirely dismissing their literary genius might seem like the right thing to do, but that would again be a parochial way of looking at things. Without the negative connotations, we would not have been able to make an analogy and appreciate the portrayals by Chaucer or Ray, who treated their women characters with empathy and deconstructed the standards of patriarchal expectations. These authors disprove Beauvoir's (2010) generalisation that men represent the world "from their own point of view, which they confound with absolute truth" (p. 196). Instead, they toil to understand and represent women subjectively and not distantly. One needs to, thus, consider Bacon's perspective along with Tagore's and Hardy's, along with Lorca's, and only then can one get a comprehensive idea about the evolution of how women have been portrayed in men's eyes through the ages. In doing so, the journey of the female figure may be traced from being overtly flat characters lacking any form of depth or psychological complexity to being depicted as self-asserting ones possessing moral ambiguity in their character.

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**The Making of a Witch: Witchcraft, Economic Crisis and the
Materialistic Culture in William Rowley, Thomas Dekker and
John Ford's Play, *The Witch of Edmonton***

Suchetona Pal
Research Scholar,
Department of English,
University of Calcutta
West Bengal, India
Email: amiya.yugen22@gmail.com

Abstract

The Witch of Edmonton, a 17th-century Jacobean play unlike the plays on witchcraft of the preceding era, presents a familiar figure of early modern English rural communities at its centre. The play offers neither a threatening image nor a theatrical spectacle of a witch. Instead, it focuses on the ramifications of a titular character embedded in the socio-economic, cultural, socio-political, and legal contexts. Contrary to the mystifying supernatural abilities, this play allows an examination of the societal role and function in the construction of a figure of a witch. This article examines how the rise of materialism, amid growing tension over a radically transforming economy, contributed to the identity formation of a witch. It additionally addresses the extent to which Elizabeth Sawyer, the eponymous character, has succeeded and failed in resisting this enforced role under societal pressure, especially in an era when socio-economic grievances attained the stringency of legal statutes.



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Although Shakespeare's *Macbeth* (1609) canonized the stereotypes of a witch figure in the Jacobean period, the representation still continues to echo distinct resonances among its modern readers and theatre audiences. While the portrayal of the three witches made an enduring impact, it nonetheless evokes occasional confusion, an ominous note of ambiguity about their function and possible role in shaping Macbeth's tragic destiny. The allusions to Norse and classical mythology, which associate them with the three Goddesses of destiny, further render them elusive. Even though in the stage directions of the Folio, the term "witches" has been mentioned, hardly any stage character uses it explicitly; instead, the witches identify themselves as "the weird sisters" (Shakespeare, 1609, as cited in Clark & Mason, p. 139). Moreover, some controversy exists even over their naming of witches, since Raphael Holinshed, by the term "weird," refers to the "Goddess of Destiny" (Shakespeare, 1609, as cited in Clark & Mason, p. 139), some nymphs, or even fairies. However, this article focuses on Elizabeth Sawyer, the titular character of *The Witch of Edmonton*, whose identity as a witch, unlike the three witches of *Macbeth*, is acknowledged and regarded not only by the characters in the play but also by contemporary spectators. Elizabeth Sawyer, a spinster, married to Edward Sawyer of Edmonton village, was no fictional character. Henry Goodcole, an Anglican minister, records her court trial, confession, and details of execution in a pamphlet titled *The Wonderful Discovery of Elizabeth Sawyer, A Witch, Late of Edmonton* (1621). Not only the pamphlet, but also the popularity of an exaggerated version of her tale in ballad form concurrently established Sawyer's identity as a witch among her community. While the play significantly spurs scepticism close to the modern view of witchcraft, and offers a detailed account of the demonic association of witchcraft, the play most crucially attempts to explore a woman's turn to it in a community actively complicit in its making. William Rowley, Thomas Dekker, and John Ford's play, *The Witch of Edmonton* (1621), demonstrates how a close-knit early modern English community in a period of socio-cultural and socio-economic transition responds to economic crisis and the evolving materialistic culture.

The play opens with an evocation of commercial and mercantile atmosphere, as evident in the very opening line, when Frank Thorney states, "Come, wench, why here's a business soon dispatched" (Rowley, Dekker & Ford, 1621, as cited in Corbin & Sedge 1986, p.146), where "business", implies anxiety or trouble and "dispatched" meaning settled (Rowley, Dekker & Ford, 1621, as cited in Munro, 2017). Overall, it immediately indicates an atmosphere of a business negotiation that has been duly taken care of. This indeed proves to be true, later in the scene, when Frank seeks monetary aid from Arthur Clarington, reminding him of a "portion" (Rowley, Dekker & Ford, 1621, as cited in Corbin & Sedge 1986, p.148), denoting dowry, he promised for Winnifride's marriage. Clarington's prompt reply to Frank's question about the financial offer "...what think'st thou of two hundred pound And a continual friend?" (Rowley, Dekker & Ford, 1621, as cited in Corbin & Sedge 1986, p.149) has an absolute air of mercantile negotiations as well. Ironically, despite his preaching and chastising of Frank for corrupting an innocent maid and making his house disreputable with his lustful desire, we come to know how Clarington made his maid Winnifred pregnant. As he calls Frank "Cuckoo" (Rowley, Dekker & Ford, 1621, as cited in Corbin & Sedge 1986, p.150) when the latter departs, we can conjecture how he had successfully manipulated Frank to believe himself responsible for Winnifride's condition and forced him to marry her.

On the other hand, Frank's service to the household of Clarington appears to be more than a mere custom of serving the household of aristocrats by the children of gentry, since it

indicates his insolvent status and the necessity of wages also. Frank ominously describes his economic crisis in demonic terms when he mentions “The misery of beggary and want” as “Two devils” that bring forth “shameful end” (Rowley, Dekker & Ford, as cited in Corbin & Sedge 1986, p. 146). In the following scene, while Old Carter and Old Thorney discuss the prospective marriage between their progeny, Susan and Frank, the conversation focuses primarily on the transactional aspect of marital negotiation, with Old Thorney appreciating Carter’s generous offer as marriage money. However it was not only the discussion of the two patriarchs, but also the exuberant courtship of the young pairs, that of Susan and Warbeck, and Katherine and Somerton, which vigorously exudes contemporary emphasis on materialism, with Susan chiding Warbeck, for commodifying marriage, (Stretton, 2018, p. 142)- “Am I a property for you to use?” (Rowley, Dekker & Ford, 1621, as cited in Corbin & Sedge 1986, p.155). It is in this context that Elizabeth Sawyer is introduced. While the main plot focuses on bigamy as a legal and moral crime, the playwrights place it to be also embedded in Frank’s economic crisis, similar to that of Sawyer’s witchcraft.

In early modern England, the significance of an overall economic condition in constituting a witch's identity was first underlined by Reginald Scot. Published in 1584, Scot’s *Discoverie of Witchcraft* raised a question about the interrelation of the identity of a witch and her poverty-stricken condition. Instead of describing them with inherent maliciousness and supernatural power, he points out their self-delusion, melancholia, and old age, who rely heavily upon the charity of the community for their regular needs – “These go from house to house, and from doore to doore fora pot full of milke, yest, drinke, pottage, or some such releefe; without the which they could hardlie live...” (Scot, 1584, chapter 3). When Henry Goodcole attempts to explain Sawyer’s resort to witchcraft, his pamphlet draws on a reason primarily involved with her economic condition. In an overtly simplified explanation, Goodcole mentions that Sawyer held her neighbours responsible for her unprofitable trade of selling brooms, “because her neighbours where she dwelt, would not buy Broomes of her” (1621, as cited in Gibson, 2000, p. 305). This lack of cooperation for financial aid, in turn, made her spiteful and thus striking her neighbours with a malevolent form of witchcraft, according to Goodcole, appeared to be a rational consequence. What is ironical about Goodcole’s explanation is that he presents the process of embracing the identity of a witch as an occasion of conscious choice-making, while it is the lack of adequate choice that forcefully marginalizes and categorically coerces her to accept an identity ascribed to her by society. David Stymeist (2001) thus observes that, despite acknowledging Sawyer's socio-economic crisis, Goodcole does not portray her as a victim of persecution, even though he assesses her maliciousness towards her neighbours as a consequence of her destitution. Unlike the pamphlet, the play neither makes any direct reference to her livelihood nor to the existence of any family member. Consequently, we are unsure of her vocation and whether she has any source of income for survival. However, her precarious and anxiety-stricken psychological state, prompted by her beggarly economic condition, has been implicated within the play. On her first arrival on stage, she explains the socio-economic reasons behind her persistent agony. To Old Banks’s admonition of her presence on his landed property, she expresses her dire need of collecting “a few rotten sticks to warm” herself (Rowley, Dekker & Ford, 1621, as cited in Corbin & Sedge 1986, p. 159), indicating how her existence depends entirely upon charity.

Historians like Alan Macfarlane (1970) and Keith Thomas (1971) have significantly observed a change in the contemporary economy and an overall transformation in an individual's attitude to money and property. Both Macfarlane and Thomas have pointed to the structural changes in society that significantly contributed to the early modern English witch craze. Identifying a psychological shift in people transiting from the previously existing agricultural economy to a pre-industrial wage-based labour economy, they emphasized that people grew to be more individualistic and less morally obliged in helping their poor neighbours, unlike their predecessors. On her very first utterance, when Sawyer exclaims how she is persecuted by everyone around her, "Why should the envious world throw all their scandalous malice upon me?" (Rowley, Dekker & Ford, 1621, as cited in Corbin & Sedge 1986, p. 159), she explains it primarily as a consequence of her economic destitution. As she soon complains how the members of her community exploit her, forcefully ascribe to her a disgraceful identity, instantly, an interconnection is made between her impoverished state and the hostility of her neighbours, as in Goodcole's pamphlet. This raises the question of how the ethics of good neighbour in the small villages and towns of early modern England were determined by socio-economic identity within a predominantly materialistic culture. Sawyer claims how she is repeatedly harassed and exploited due to her impoverished status. This is reflected indeed in Old Banks's attitude to Sawyer. He curses her throughout, with the address of a "hag" (Rowley, Dekker & Ford, 1621, as cited in Corbin & Sedge 1986, p.160), "witch", "she-hell cat" (Rowley, Dekker & Ford, 1621, as cited in Corbin & Sedge 1986, p.186) even before Sawyer had turned to witchcraft by committing a demonic pact with the devil. Consequently, Sawyer's calling him "curmudgeon" (Rowley, Dekker & Ford, 1621, p. 160), literally meaning "ungenerous miser" (Kolb, 2023, p.174), reflects this resentment. Commenting on Bank's insensitive attitude Sawyer laments, "reverence once had wont to wait on age. Now an old woman, ill favour'd grown with yeers, if she be poor, must be call'd Bawd or Witch" (Rowley, Dekker & Ford, 1621, as cited in Corbin & Sedge 1986, p.188) indicating how with the change of time, a reversal of the value system is introduced, where seniority in age does not evoke respect, instead her poverty has become the defining characteristic, and therefore object of persecution (Stymeist, 2001).

Citing instances of both continuity and transformation in the customs and conventions of the early modern socio-cultural, legal, and economic domains that significantly shape interpersonal relations in English rural communities, Tim Stretton (2018) indicates how Elizabeth Sawyer's victimization as a witch resulted from the combined effect of the two. The onset of the capitalistic economy not only initiated a rise of materialism but also a sense of inequality, followed by a lack of empathy and sensitivity towards the marginalized. This unfair, disproportionately structured economy, in the context of increasing population growth, also affected people psychologically, contributing to public scapegoating of Sawyer (Stretton, 2018). While Old Carter represents the desire to continue with the old custom of owning landed property as financial security, a new interest in trade and the commercial ventures was also developing. Represented through the Thorneys, it indicates how the definition of property, asset, and economic security altered from its erstwhile emphasis on landholdings. Sawyer, when furious at Clarrington's suggestion that she should maintain distance from the devilish influence, flaringly questions her authority, by employing the metaphor of the hierarchical equation between a land owning master and his slave in agriculture based economy, –"Is he a landlord of my soul to thrust it, when he list, out of door?" (Rowley, Dekker & Ford, 1621, as cited in Corbin & Sedge

1986, p.187) An overall transformation in the economy thus implicates a sociological practice, where the impoverished individual increasingly becomes a scapegoat, bearing brunt of the moral guilt of the moderately affluent and selfish people (Sharpe, 1999). The tide of the capitalistic economy thus brought change in the conventional practices, which conveniently place witchcraft at the margin with the aim that the act of excluding such members appears less morally culpable. Sawyer's description of such treatment from her neighbours, "shunned and hated like a sickness" (Rowley, Dekker & Ford, 1621, as cited in Corbin & Sedge 1986, p.162) further elucidates this self-serving mechanism of the society.

The discussion on the influence of a materialistic culture and how it evolved in the early modern society requires a definition of the concept like "class" and how landed property and other assets are associated with an individual's socio-economic status. Although 19th 19th-century Marxist connotation was absent from the early modern notion of "class", yet the continuous process of categorizing and even discriminating on the basis of economic status was perceivable everywhere. While elucidating the term "class" in the early modern context, Ronda Arab and Laurie Ellinghausen (2023) observe that it does not define the contribution or participation of an individual in economic production, but rather evaluates his/her socio-cultural position in a hierarchical society. This is also evident from the early modern expression of "credit", which, apart from connoting trust, also suggests the socio-cultural worth of an individual (Amussen, 1985). Thus, economic class or status in early modern England denotes not only financial assets and landed property but also includes an individual's socio-economic standing. Thus, Frank Thorney, reminding his master, Arthur Clarrington, of his promise of financial compensation, mentions- "Sir Arthur Clarrington deserves the credit Report hath lent him," (Rowley, Dekker & Ford, 1621, as cited in Corbin & Sedge 1986, as cited in Corbin & Sedge 1986, p. 148). "Credit" here stands for his "reputation for trustworthiness" (Munro, 2017). As Clarrington soon declares his inability to offer a "present payment", that is, providing money immediately to Frank (Rowley, Dekker & Ford, 1621, as cited in Corbin & Sedge 1986, p.149), his promise is regarded as authentic and sincere because of his "currency of reputation", or his social standing (Stretton, 143).

The term "class" is not merely limited to social standing alone, but as Ania Loomba (2002) indicates that as a stratifying category, "class" in the early modern context functions similar to race, subsuming the other categories such as gender, faith, nationality, and complexion. Arab and Ellinghausen (2023) have also employed the term "intersectionality" to suggest how race, gender, and class collectively contribute to the formation of an identity, where each one of them intersects with another, resisting any attempt to reduce an identity into a single category (p.3). Thus, not merely Sawyer's indigent status, but also her gendered identity as a solitary woman, greatly contributes to the production of a witch-figure. Lora Kolb (2023) discusses how the complex making of an identity, based on the varied notions of class, economic condition, and social standing, is also presented through specific addresses such as "wench", "witch", and "widow" (p.165) in the play. Kolb stresses that this continuous act of addressing an individual with such specificity initiates an ongoing process of identity formation, even though unstable, and subject to negotiation. Elizabeth Sawyer initially questions and disregards this externally enforced identity of a witch, yet later she conforms to this as a morally ambivalent address, "'Tis all one To be a witch as to be counted one" (Rowley, Dekker & Ford, 1621, as cited in Corbin & Sedge 1986, p.162). When the justice asks her to confirm about her identity as a witch, she

unflinchingly responds, “I am none!,”...“If every poor old woman be trod on thus by slaves, reviled, kicked, beaten, as I am daily, she to be revenged had need turn witch”, (Rowley, Dekker & Ford, 1621, as cited in Corbin & Sedge 1986, p. 187) thus indicating the societal pressure, which forcefully urges her to conform to the identity of a witch. The gender and age-specific addresses like “witch” and “wench” also reveal interpersonal relations, mapping the emotional quotient, suggesting closeness or social distance, in other words, their acceptability or banishment within a community. Frank and Clarrington’s address of “wench” to Winnifride not only indicates her age, but also emotional proximity. The addresses thus subtly operate on discrimination, deeply ingrained in the economic status and socio-cultural position, where someone like Winnifride is accepted, regarded, and the other, as Sawyer is ostracized. Responding to Sawyer’s question whether Banks actually called her a witch, the latter assuredly remarks “I do, witch, I do; and worse I would, knew I a name/ more hateful” (Rowley, Dekker & Ford, 1621, as cited in Corbin & Sedge 1986, p. 159), thus implicating how the identity of a witch is constructed to contain the unpleasant, despicable even unnamable aspects of a community. Sawyer also expresses how the identity of a witch is constituted in order to generate a space of unwanted waste, “a common sink” (Rowley, Dekker & Ford, 1621, as cited in Corbin & Sedge 1986, p. 159), where the most obnoxious abuse can be placed. Although the Justice attempts to pacify the crowd, the violent uprising of the mob shouting “hang her, beat her, kill her!” (Rowley, Dekker & Ford, 1621, as cited in Corbin & Sedge 1986, p. 186) indicates how a witch is a figure of persecution, whom the mass aggressively wants to eliminate. The reason for purging society of her is convenient not only on moral grounds, but also because of her absence from the workforce, productivity, and lack of socio-economic standing.

The predominance of materialistic culture is evoked not only through the stress on economic condition, but is consolidated with legal statutes. Old Banks, when displeased by Sawyer’s frequent visit to his property, charges “What makest thou upon my ground?” (Rowley, Dekker & Ford, 1621, as cited in Corbin & Sedge 1986, p. 159), accusing her of illegal intrusion into his property. Before the enclosure laws were legislated, the village indigents were allowed to collect essential resources of domestic and daily utility, such as firewood or materials for building thatch from the local common (Stymeist, 2001). The newly introduced enclosure law not only repudiated such a claim but also forced people of the marginalized section to survive on the charity of the affluent class. According to David Stymeist (2001), the stringent legality drove the impoverished population to begging, merging them with the class of criminals and vagabonds. In this context, the identity of a witch scarcely conforms to the magic or supernatural power, but gradually merges with that of the petty criminals, who attempt to take advantage of the affluent class by crooked means. In this context, we must remember that the vagrant act of 1547 legalized the enslavement of vagabonds or Masterless Men (Habib, 2008). The contemporary Government policy during the era of no poor law act ensured that the idle, unproductive group of vagabonds received stringent punishment, unlike the grant-receiving parish poor. Elizabeth Sawyer represents the former kind, the vagabond. Thus, when she confronts restrictions regarding the usage of the land, Sawyer’s angry tirade unwittingly ushered in the devil. Sawyer, consequently, not merely suffers from a deprivation of legal protection, but in consequence received no assistance from her community that practically ensured her economic impoverishment, and further marginalization.

Sawyer is nonetheless self-aware of the social mechanism involved in making her a witch. Thus, when desperate to protect herself from atrocious abuse, she prays for an agency, indiscriminating the question of morality that would not only enable her to survive but also to avenge her perpetrators. With her blasphemous speech and her dog that popular witchcraft lore considers a demonic imp, or “familiars”, socio-culturally she fulfills the stereotypes of a witch. As a result, when misfortunes of any kind occur, such as the madness of Anne Ratcliffe, the cuckolding of a new wife, the death and illness of the cattle, Sawyer becomes an easy target of scapegoating. Sawyer nonetheless attempts to challenge and redefine the identity of a witch when she ascribes repulsive attributes to the morally corrupted, pretentious men and women of the money-making affluent class. Mocking Clarrington’s attempt to insult her by the address of a “witch” she retorts that the identity of a witch is “universal” and a “brave name” (Rowley, Dekker & Ford, 1621, as cited in Corbin & Sedge 1986, p.187) and satirizing him further warns him not to use the name of a witch in irreverence. Voicing her censure against the corruptible, unscrupulous, and inconsiderate class of adversaries, she points at their materialistic greed. As opposed to the widespread conventional definition of a poverty-stricken, old witch of the rural communities, she incorporates alluring mistresses of the royal court, profligate urban wives, pretentious men of lofty titles, lawyers, and verbally abusive women into her list of different kinds of witches. Thus, distinctly drawing contrast with herself, and vividly portraying how moral sin is associated with each one of them, she describes them as more “witch-like” than her imposed identity of a witch (Rowley, Dekker & Ford, 1621, as cited in Corbin & Sedge 1986, p. 187). She illustrates how the mistresses at court with their youthful charm can change the “whole lordships”, “ploughs and teams” into sheer materialistic objects, such as “trunks of rich attire”, and coaches (Rowley, Dekker & Ford, 1621, as cited in Corbin & Sedge 1986, p.188). The spendthrift wives, she notes, lead to their husbands’ bankruptcy; men with prestigious titles, like Clarrington, unflinchingly manipulate and sexually exploit innocent maids, and the lawyers turn a profit through falsifying the ignorant lots with hopes. Sawyer, although resists explicitly accepting her identity as a witch until her execution, attempts to present the identity of a witch as devoid of moral transgression.

The complicity of 17th-century law and judicial procedure in England, however, initiates Sawyer’s ultimate destruction. Similar to treason, witchcraft was considered a special crime that allowed laxity in the case of inadequate evidence. Consequently, the court verdict was often swayed by the authority’s suspicion rather than proper investigations and testimonials (Durstun, 2019). While all the characters of the main plot reunite and empathize with Frank at his execution, Sawyer is not allowed to make an emotionally evocative speech. Her abrupt confession on devil’s trickery serves merely as a cautionary example for the masses, when Old Carter even attempts to hold the witch responsible for murdering his daughter, Susan. However, with the abandonment of the dog Tom, as portrayed as a familiar, her death evokes no sympathy from either the characters on stage or the spectators. It is Clarrington’s socio-economic rank as an affluent landowner that allows him to avoid grave punishment at the end. Although he is chastised and charged for his treacherous involvement in the crime, Old Carter’s admonition of him, as the real malefactor deserving punishment more than Frank and Sawyer, appears to evoke a sense of moral justice in the world of moral disorder at the conclusion.

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Gājan : An Interpretation of Social Intricacies in Fringe Bengal

Rishanku Das

Independent Scholar

West Bengal, India.

Email: rishanku2002@gmail.com

Abstract

Rituals and festivals serve an essential function in shaping a community's identity and, side by side, reflect the region's social patterns, where people rejoice and proceed towards community building. Most interestingly, the masses carry these social ailments within themselves, which are reflected in festive rituals like Gājan. Celebrated during the Bengali month of Chaitra, the central practitioners of the festival are the antaja sampradaya, i.e., lower castes (Nicholas 2013, Sircar 2016), although by discipline the festival encompasses all social boundaries. By performing rites of social immolation, villagers worship Shiva and Dhamma, with the deity Surya holding equal significance (Nicholas 2013). The deities are envisioned with rural interpretations and dynamism while also encompassing the more popular Brahmanical interpretations of North India. This refers to the processes of universalisation and parochialisation (Marriott 1955), with elements of Sanskritisation also at play. Thus, this paper attempts to critically examine social intricacies in rural Bengal, i.e., fringe Bengal, using the folk festival Gājan as a tool for assessment. Although the scope of the paper is geographically limited to Rarh Bengal (Bankura, Birbhum, Purulia, Paschim Medinipur, etc.) and Southern Bengal (Howrah, Hooghly, South 24 Parganas, etc.), it engages in a comparative study of a few primary case studies to avoid inconsistencies in narratives through a historical approach. The paper is divided into three subsections: the first deals with the general introduction to the Gājan festival, followed by the background under which such a social hierarchical system was established in village Bengal, which is reflected in Gājan, and concludes the discussion with an attempt to interpret social intricacies by observing the rituals of Gājan.

Keywords: Gājan, Vanga, Sanskritisation, Ethnocentrism, Universalization, Parochialization.



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Introduction

Michel Foucault, one of the most renowned French historians of the 20th century, throughout his career has sought to propound a theory focused on power, knowledge, and discourse. He believed that “power was what was seen, what was shown and what was manifested,” and, interestingly, he found the overbearing principle of its force in the way it deployed it. Thus, on whom power was exercised remain in the state of depravity; while they received light/solace only from that portion of power which was conceded to them by those who remain in control of it, or from the reflection of power that for a moment they seem to manifest (Foucault 1979).

When these ideas are applied to our understanding of caste in India, it seems quite logical to think that caste was not always about ritual purity. Rather, it was a social power struggle in which the political and economic factors at times could influence social stance and, as a result, had very little to do with the ideals of ritual purity. Louis Dumont, in his book *Homo Hierarchicus — Caste System and Its Implications*, seems to refute this idea, as his observations were based on the view that the political and economic domains of social life in India are encompassed by religion. As Brahmins symbolise ritual purity, while kings symbolise political authority. Disagreeing with Dumont, however, there are some texts that consider the king to be above the Brahmin, for example, in the royal consecration ceremony. While in several other instances the Brahmin appears superior to the king, for example, in the Manu Dharmasastra. Moreover, Dumont also suggested that caste is primarily religious, based on the domains of purity and pollution. But an ethno-historical study in South India conducted by Nicholas B. Dirks contradicts Dumont’s claim; according to him, the Kallars of Pudukkottai did not belong to higher castes like kshatriyas, but still were legitimate rulers who even heavily patronized Brahmins according to the royal gifting activity.

If the interpretation of power politics in caste were applied to social caste or class positions in village Bengal, we would see that the villages were organised within a feudal society in which agricultural labour served as the chief mode of production. In this regard, power concentration seemed directly proportional to maintaining control over the mode of production. Thus, in such a social organisational scenario folk festivals like Gājan, which is a communal festival celebrated during the hot and dry months in Rarh and Southern Bengal, dealing with the basic necessity of asking for a boon from the mythical deity in order to regenerate back fertility in the fields, which is done by employing non-brahmins as chief worshippers of the deity although only after they are purified through the sacred thread, followed by the acts of self-immolation makes one think is Gājan a symbolic representation of the social fabric within which the repressed are sucked under? An adequate attempt of interpretation has been undertaken in this regard.

About Gājan

Gājan is a spring festival that takes place in the Bengali months of Chaitra (March-April) and Baisakh (April-May), the last and first months of the Bengali year, in different parts of West Bengal (particularly in the Rarh region and southern Bengal). In localities where a second Gājan (called Abar Gājan) is organised, it generally concludes on the first day of Jyaishta (May-June). The festival is centred around the worship of Hindu deities Shiva, Dharma, and Surya through rituals of self-mortification and traditional deity worship. In the Rarh region, Gajan focuses on

the worship of Dharmadev and is called Dharma Gajan, while in other regions of Bengal, Shiva is the more popular deity in Gājan and thus it is called Shiber Gajan. Although the two forms of Gajan are closely connected, it is widely believed that Gājan of Shiva is a later rendition, a result of the Sanskritisation of the local pantheon, as demonstrated by M.N. Srinivas in his book *“Religion and Society among the Coorgs of South India”*.

Jawhar Sircar (2005) argues that the distinctive social fabric and religious culture of a local village community in Bengal are essential factors in setting up a composite culture dominated by Brahmanical Hindu ideas. According to Sircar, while important local deities such as Manasa were absorbed into Brahmanical practice, the Brahmins most often avoided Dharma Thakur and substituted Siva for Dharma. As a result, Shiva Gajan became widely popularised, while Dharma Gajan remains in the background. Moreover, Haraprasad Shastri, in his brief report in the proceedings of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, considers a Buddhist origin of the Gājan with regard to Dharma worship (Law 1933). Thus, it may have led to the deity's insignificance with the decaying Buddhism. However, Shashi Bhushan Dasgupta, in his book *“Obscure Religious Cult”* (1995), relies on a synthesis of primitive practices to understand the origin of deity, agreeing with Ashutosh Bhattacharya's claim that the Dharma of Gājan could be traced to the pre-Aryan sun god (Bhattacharya 1975).

Few or no references to Gājan could be found in the Vedas, Upanishads, and Puranas. While Ramai Pandit's *Sunya Purana* indirectly refers to the hook swinging festival (Pandit 1908), it is the Dharma Mangal Kavya of Ghanaram, Rupram Chakravarty, and Anadi Mangal of Ramdas Adak (Chakrabarti 1912, Adak 1939) which serves as the chief treatise of worship of deities during Gājan, although it solely relies on myths to build a premise of the deity worship. Before the festival begins, the bhaktas/sannyasis (ascetics) are selected from various social groups and are relieved from all caste distinctions for the remainder of the festival. During this period, they undergo a stage of purification and righteousness by eating simple, uncontaminated food and by wearing a sacred thread to make themselves worthy of deity worship. Alongside such acts, after the beginning of Gājan, the ascetics go through several gruesome methods of self-immolation. These include *hindola* or sacred swing, fire walking, the *pit-phorne* or piercing the back, *charake-ora* or swing in mid air, the '*jib-phorne*' or piercing the tongue, *rajani-phorne* dance, etc (B.Chaudhuri 1987). Symbolically, Gājan stands for creation and regeneration, i.e., the union of the human fertility cult and the agrarian fertility cult; the process to achieve this union is through self-immolation.

Moreover, Gājan also reflects social order and power dynamics, influenced by social and cultural outlooks. While the festival brings various caste and social groups together, evidence of social constraints is also visible. Unlike in mainstream Brahmanical rituals, in Gājan, the ritual priests belong to the lower caste order; even though they are Brahmins, they must be low-born Brahmins. Also, the role of Brahmin priests is minimal, while the lower castes, Sadgope, Napit, Kumar, Bagdi, and Dom actively participate only after going through ritual purification, and their festival ends when they have endured self-immolation for the sake of satisfying the mythical figure.

Gājan -The substructure behind its social stance

Bengal, a low-lying flood plane shaped like a great horseshoe, has long been a victim of Indo-Aryan cultural disparity, even before and after its inclusion in Brahmanical writings. According to

H.C.Raychowdhury, “The historic land included within the area now known as Bengal finds no mention in Vedic hymns.” However, it is not mere negligence but the deliberate subjugation of the later period that draws particular attention to the study of this matter. For instance, in the Śatapatha Brahmana of the later Vedic period, one sees the eastward movement of an Indo-Aryan king and Agni, the god of fire. In this legend, Agni refuses to cross the Gandak river and enter Bengal as it is unfit for Vedic sacrifices. Agreeing with this, the Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa and the Yajñavalkya Smṛiti suggest several remedies for purifying the Indo-Āryans who have travelled to these ritually polluted regions. Also, expressions like Vaṅgāvagadhāh/Vaṅga-Magadhāh, i.e, people of Vaṅga and Magadha, have been found in Aitareya Āraṇyaka, who are charged with the guilt of transgression. The theologians of the Aitareya Brāhmaṇa classed these people as ‘dasyus’.

One might regard these utterances as constricted observations made by novice Indo-Āryans lacking comprehension of Bengal’s social landscape during the Vedic (1500-1000 BCE) and later Vedic (1000-500 BCE) periods, which were corrected thereafter, explaining the fickle change in the Indo-Āryan narrative. While this interpretation cannot be logically ruled out, as in the post-later Vedic literature, like in the epic of Ramayana, probably composed between 500 BCE-300 CE, the Vangas (an early Bengal tribe of central and eastern Bengal) are no longer shunned as impure barbarians; moreover, political relations are maintained with them by high-born aristocrats of Ayodhyā. Further encouragement is provided to visit the land of Pundras (North Bengal) and Mandara (Western Bengal). However, this cannot be the only elucidation behind such a barbarous demonstration.

The idea of cultural supremacy over another has been a recurring theme for scholars to decode. The term ‘ethnocentrism’ coined by William Sumner in 1906, focused on the belief that an alien culture is evaluated based on the standards and values of one’s own culture. Thus, aspects of one’s own culture are considered far superior in comparison to other socio-cultural groups. The migrating Indo-Āryans were not deprived of such sentiments. Thus, in accordance with ethnocentrism, an alternative take of Indo-Āryan resentment of Bengal could be summarised.

The Indo-Āryans, who probably entered from the north and west, brought with them a vast corpus of Sanskrit sacred literature. These, along with the appearance of new pottery styles, showcase a gradual eastward shift of Indo-Aryan culture. According to Michael Witzel, in the twelfth century BCE, Indo-Aryan cultural production flourished in the East Punjab and Haryana (Kuru) area, and by the seventh to sixth century BCE, the influence had expanded to eastern U.P. and the northern Bihar (Videha) region. Literature produced towards the end of this migratory process indicates the construction of a hierarchical, ordered society headed by Brahmanas, with ideas of ritual purity and pollution conferring superior status on the Indo-Āryans, while non-aryans were portrayed as barbarians (mlecchas). This led to the construction of a cultural frontier, a purity barrier separating them from the rest of the non-Aryans. This conceptual perimeter, based on Brahmanical ritualistic pollution, culminated in practical geopolitical frontiers.

For instance, in the Bodhāyana Dharmasūtra, the subcontinent is divided into three ethnic belts. The holiest lies between the Himalayas and the western Vindhya and was termed as Āryāvarta (land of the Aryans). The zone that stood next embraced Malwa, Deccan, and South Bihar. While the outermost belt included Pundras of North Bengal, Vangas of central and eastern Bengal, etc. Regions outside the Āryāvarta zone were regarded as outside the Vedic

cultural domain. Also, these zones were not watertight territories; as in the Rig Veda, the eastern frontier of Āryavārta was the Yamuna River; in the Paippalāda Samhita, it was Kasi; in the Saunakīya Samhita, it was Anga (Eastern Bihar); while in the Aitareya Samhita, it was Pundra (Northern Bengal). This constant eastward shift confirms that, despite such taboos, the Indo-Aryan groups settled in the lower Ganges region and merged with the paddy-cultivating non-Aryans, even though, according to them, it was once ritually unclean. Therefore, it raises the obvious question: why such contradictions? If indeed pollution and ritual purity served as key factors of demarcation from non-Aryans, one might ask why mingle with them later on? How did the land (Bengal), which was once impure for Vedic sacrifices, suddenly become virtuous and part of Āryavārta?

If the theory of automatic sanctification of land inhabited by Indo-Āryans could be put aside, it may be considered that subjugation was a tool in the hands of the migrating Indo-Āryans. To establish an Indo-Aryan sway by terming the indigenous folk as irrelevant, their actions barbaric, and their land polluted. Thus, generating the need for a more civilised group to take over. A product of imperial tenacity, as one might see in recent history, one of the latest examples being when Rudyard Kipling wrote the poem “The White Man’s Burden”.

However, while it may have been established that signs of pollution were essential to the success of Indo-Aryan territorial expansion in the east, and had little to do with the religious indecency of the then inhabitants of Bengal. It is bound to be asked: Why and how did the actions of the first wave of migrating Brahman idealists in areas (now Bengal) have any relevance when studying primitive folk festivals like Gājan? While there is no simplified answer, something which is for certain and not mind-baffling is the installation of a rigid hierarchical-based social system in regions of Bengal only after the Indo-Aryan ascendancy in the East. If this stands true, taking cue from it, Dharma Gajan, i.e., worship of Dharma thakur, in the Rarh region of Bengal, its worship is often traced to the primitive sun-cult of pre-Aryan times (Ashutosh Bhattacharjee). Sukumar Sen also points out that the ‘antiquity of Dharmaraj predated the Vedas’. Thus, if the worship of ‘Dharma thakur’ indeed preceded the Indo-Aryan migration in Bengal, then why do caste roles play such an essential part in modern Dharma Gājan celebrations? For example, the Basahari ascetics (house dwellers) of Gājan are mostly from the Napit (Barber) caste, and the dhakis (drum players) belong to the Dom caste. As caste intricacies could not have been established when Dharma worship first began. While this shall be addressed later, the point to be made here is that, even though Gājan is a “home-grown” ritual of Bengal, it addresses the arduous needs of ordinary people, unlike the Brahmanical Hindu rites with post-vedantic ritual authority. The eventual syncretism and amalgamation of migratory and indigenous cultures in Bengal have brought Gājan within the realm of Brahmanical Hindu rites and, by doing so, have installed caste hierarchy and social prejudices within the folk festival, which the Indo-Āryans have cherished for so long in the context of community building.

Interpretation of Gājan

Gājan or Gambhīrā (called in North West Bengal), celebrated in the Bengali month of Chaitra (March-April), is a spring ritual focusing on the worship of Dharma or Shiva and at times Surya (Sun god), which, according to Ralph W. Nicholas, “seeks resurrection in the desiccating heat of unrelenting sun”. As the festival falls at the conjecture of spring (basanta) and hot (grimsa) season, Bengal, mostly being a low-lying delta, falls victim to the excess heat. The soil dries up

while the water bodies are depleted of the elixir of life. As any village community sustaining itself on agriculture would rely on these essential resources of life, the occasion of Gājan, in essence, is not merely a celebration during this period but rather a cry for social rejuvenation in the form of mythical rain to address practical issues.

Further agreeing to this outlook, J.M. Dasa traced the term Gājan to the Sanskrit word 'Gārjana', meaning 'crying' or 'rumbling'. On the other hand, Ralph W. Nicholas points out that 'Gà' may refer to 'Grama' (village), and 'jana' refers to people. Although these explanations lack linguistic credibility, the varied interpretations of the nomenclature do indicate that the rituals of Gājan focus on drawing attention to communal miseries, as previously discussed. Additionally, evidence for such an interpretation can be drawn from the case studies and surveys of Gājan conducted by Ákös Östör in the villages of Bishnupur (Bankura, West Bengal) and by Ralph W. Nicholas in the Kelomal group of villages (Tamluk, East Medinipur). Both of these authors have witnessed Gājan (Shiva Gājan) in two distinct regions of Bengal, at two fairly different time frames and local patterns, yet have still based their premises about Shiva Gājan on a singular, uniform line. Ákös Östör focused on the relationship between the Bhakta/sannyasi (ascetic) and his bhakti (religious belief). In Gājan, they denote a 'special kind of devotion' in which their sole purpose is to gain the favour of the deity through various ascetic practices and self-immolation. This exposition lines well with Ralph W. Nicholas's interpretation of Gājan in Kelomal. According to him, the deity has turned his face from the world and is sitting atop the mountain. As a result, the world is heating up, and all the fertilizing power is withheld. Thus, people who want to arouse and gain fruits must go through acts of austerities and self-immolation to acquire protection from the deity's anger. Acts of self-immolation can be traced in literary accounts such as *Dharma Mangal* (1662) by Rupram Chakraborty, which is one of the oldest treatises on Dharma worship and the first to mention the term 'Gājan' in the modern era.

As the story progresses, the hero Lausen and his mother Rañjāvati both impose upon themselves great acts of self-immolation, such as Rañjāvati throwing herself on a plank studded with sharp spikes or Lausen offering his body, divided into nine pieces. In both scenarios, the deity, impressed by their sacrifices, revives them and grants their wish. While Rañjāvati held a more personal wish to bear a child, Lausen's wish encompassed communal desires, thus symbolising the dual purpose of Gājan ascetics. The central theme of the story thus revolves around the idea that self-harm would help gain the deity's favour. Based on this, in both *Dharma Gājan* and *Shiva Gājan*, the ascetics symbolically imitate a similar theme, i.e., the deity's ability to bring the dead back to life through the return of rain, the growth of crops, etc. The concept of the dead being brought back to life has been a recurring theme in Bengali folklore found in *Manasa Mangal* (faithful wife restoring life of husband) as well as *Śitalā Mangal* (dead children brought back to life) but these are considerably contrasting to the narrative of *Dharma Mangal* as here the followers had to voluntarily proclaim self harm on themselves to worship the deity. Therefore, in Gājan, the deity is not portrayed as a selfless, compassionate figure; his pity is only witnessed after his followers voluntarily endure sufficient pain. Consequently, it makes one eager to speculate that the mythical descriptions in *Dharmamangal* may be a symbolic indication of a relationship between an overlord (deity) and his subjects (Gājan ascetics), i.e., an indication of a feudal hierarchical society.

Evidence of serfdom could be found from the Fifth-Seventh century C.E. copper plate grants found in Bengal. For example, the Ashrafpur grants (7th century C.E.) from East Bengal

record the information of individuals who held rights over a plot of land and also named the cultivators who tilled it. The grant also records that the plot was later granted to a Buddhist monastery headed by Samghmitra, while the cultivators remained undisturbed, as if they were tied to the soil. In this scenario, if there is a period of crop failure, the subjects of the village beg for mercy from their overlords or take loans from moneylenders, and the peasants must endure considerable trouble to repay them. Similarly, in preparations to Gājan, when the weather fails an agrarian based village society, the villagers fall in great jeopardy and with no choice, undergo significant physical harm leading to their Garjana (crying/rumbling) to the deity, which not only acts as a reminder but also a form of payment to the mythical overlord in return for more pleasant weather conditions.

Thus, from the very stem of interpreting Gājan, one sees the impression of a hierarchical social system complemented with the displeasure of the deity, the reason of which is vague, but one might hypothesize if it has anything to do with the being called out and worshipped by non-Brahmanas as well as by non-dvijas (Shudras and outcastes).

Additionally, another important aspect of Gājan, which highlights that social inconsistencies were in order, was the process of renunciation of Bhaktas (ascetics) to perform Gājan. Renunciation holds a high regard in the history of Indian religious cultures. In the Dharmasastra and Mahabharata, it is described as the last stage of man's life. Louis Dumont proclaimed that the concept of renunciation was critical to understand Indian society, as it focuses on collective identity rather than individual action. But in Gājan, renunciation is seen as a temporary time-out for participants (ascetics) from worldly life to engage in the worship of the deity, as it is followed not by Moksha but by a return to samsāra. This temporary reprieve of ascetics from worldly matters is unique to the performance of Gājan and, as a result, must be examined to interpret the social norms it imbibes.

While many Hindu domestic rituals are performed by non-Brahmana householders, Hindu communal rites are exclusively presided over by Brahmana priests as prescribed by the Varna system as well as by the Sanskrit puranas, which associate Brahmanas 'as intermediaries to deities on behalf of others'. However, in the case of a communal festival like Gājan in which Hindu deities such as Shiva, Dharma, and Surya are worshipped, the rites are chiefly performed by ordinary non-Brahmana householders who go through severe austerities in order to qualify themselves for the occasion. Evidence of which could be found from the accounts and surveys conducted by Amalendu Mitra, who surveyed the organization of Gajan in over 85 villages in 1972, Rebati Mohan Sarkar's (1986) ethnographic research of Gājan in Southwest Birbhum and Northwest Bardhaman, Frank J. Korom's (1992) description of Dharma Gajan in Goalpara village, Shantiniketan, and many more. So, it may be asked that even though Gājan marks the worship of deities in the Hindu pantheon, why then is it chiefly participated in and worshipped by non-Brahman groups? Won't it go against the norms of the varna system? The observations with regard to this are manifold.

Firstly, Brahmanas do not completely sideline themselves from Gājan rites, as there are certain ceremonies in which the role of a Brahmana is considered indispensable. Thus, while the Kayasthas and higher-ranking Brahmans stand largely outside the execution of Gajan, quite interestingly, the socially lower placed Brahmanas cordially participate in the festival. As witnessed by Ralph W. Nicholas in Gājan of Kelomal village, the Brahmanas engaged in Gājan

practices belong to the Vyāsokta order, which were domestic priests of Mahisyas and are lowly placed within the brahmanical hierarchical order.

In fact, bhaktas (ascetics) from various social groups, including lower-order Brahmanas, undergo austerities to become ascetics. Again, from the accounts of Ralph W. Nicholas, it is suggested that from the households of Banamalikalua, ascetics for the sake of village Gājan were called upon who belonged to high-caste groups such as Brahmanas and Kayasthas, as well as included Mahisyas, Garland-makers, and Barbers who are often socially downtrodden. Therefore, based on such observations, Gajan does not seem to be contained only within the non-brahmana groups, and the participation of Brahmanas indicates Gājan's compliance with the norms of the varna system. Moreover, it seems that the occasion of Gajan facilitates social cooperation, placing high-caste and low-caste ascetics on the same footing. While it seems legitimate, the presence of lower-order Brahmanas and the absence of the higher order of the same indicate that societal factionalism was certainly influential in Gājan rites.

According to Ákös Östor, "Almost all high caste and low caste participate in the Gajan Bhaktas (ascetics) do puja regardless of caste, and there is no separation in eating". However, Ákös Östor was quick to remind us that "people do not use Gājan to carry castelessness in everyday life"; rather, Gajan does not aim to eradicate social contradictions through rituals; rather, it falls within them. This can well be understood by emphasising the procedure to be an ascetic, making the interpretation rather complex.

The foremost participants in Gājan are known as sannyāsī or bhakta. A sannyāsī is a person who has renounced worldly life temporarily during the period of Gājan through ascetic practice. There are two types of ascetics in Gājan: those appointed by a community called 'Deśer Sannyāsī' and those who make a personal vow to become ascetics called 'Mānasik Sannyāsī'. Throughout the course of Gājan, the ascetics survive on a havisya vegetarian diet, food cooked in clarified butter, suitable for offering in a fire sacrifice. The food itself seems to be based on conditions of being ritually pure or impure, comparable to the Hindu custom of impurity (āsaucha) during one's funeral rites. Also, an amalgamation of myths and practical rituals showcases that during the period of Gājan, the deity seems to have been invited to leave the ascetic life and take up worldly life; therefore, the deity is greeted with both uncooked and cooked food. However, cooked foods like rice can easily become contaminated, so precautions must be taken to preserve their purity. Evidences of such a condition are condensed in accounts of Amalendu Mitra's study of Gajan in 85 villages, as well as in Ralph W. Nicholas's case study of Gājan in Kelomal. During the entire year, the Sūdra householders of the village are not qualified to make such food offerings to the deity because they are not dvija (twice born). Nevertheless, for the duration of Gajan, the Sudras, along with other non-Brahmanas, are transferred to 'Shiva's clan', as the male ascetics wear sacrificial threads like the dvija men of higher castes. This is further confirmed by Ákös Östor, the sacred thread "symbolizes a new birth, birth into the gotra of the gods, not birth into the Brahman caste. Bhaktas emphasize that they are not like Brahmins but like deities. The sacred thread is used to purify objects in the puja; in the Gajan, it signifies the ability of the bhaktas to serve, touch, and worship the deities without any restrictions."

Moreover, each male ascetic receives a sacrificial thread and kusa grass ring from a Brahman before undertaking the service of the gods. The thread worn by a Brahman man, called paita (from upavita), is usually suspended from the left shoulder and under the right arm.

However, gajan ascetics wear sacred threads called *uttari* (from *uttariya*) around the neck, not across the left shoulder as in the Brahmanic fashion. Nevertheless, the objective of the sacred thread seems to be to grant legitimacy to non-Brahmanas to worship the deity and not to mix with Brahmanas, who are considered higher in the social order. Also, the legitimacy is granted by a Brahmana concurring to their authority over the entire gajan and their unquestionable purity in ritual proceedings. Therefore, it might be said that Gajan is substantially participated in by the non-Brahmanas and low jatis, but Brahmanas chiefly coordinate the festival in accordance with the norms of the Hindu religious system. This outlook is agreed by Ákös Östor - while all high and low castes participate in Gājan, the “festival is not dominated by low castes”.

Conclusion

Gājan, with its varied ritual practices, is essential for understanding the conditions of rural Bengal. While the treatment of the ascetic's body during Gājan showcases the richness of the local rites, it also holds a long tradition of worshipping agriculture and fertility. The Rarh region of Bengal is filled with folk tales, songs, and rural performances surrounding Gājan, which showcase the impact this festival has on their lives.

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Origin and Development of Sports Historiography: A Comprehensive Study between Western Countries and India

Santu Haldar
Research Scholar
Department of History
Jadavpur University, Kolkata
West Bengal, India.
Email: santuhaldar2010@gmail.com

Abstract:

As a result of efforts to expand the content of history writing, the field has gradually grown over time. In the twentieth century, this effort to expand the scope of the study of history became widespread, and history began to be written about various aspects of human activity. In addition to writing political history, economic, social, and cultural history began to gain importance, and history began to be written focusing on science, public health, women's position in society, etc. In the second half of the twentieth century, the study of sports history emerged as a new field of historical inquiry in Britain and other Western countries. Gradually, this new trend of studying history began to attract Indian historians and researchers, and the history of sports in India began to be written. Sports are a crucial aspect of human life. Just as the surrounding social and cultural environment influences sports, sports also influence it. The history of sports is essential for highlighting the importance of sports in society. In this article, an attempt has been made to highlight how the study of sports history began in Western countries and in India, and the trends and characteristics of this field.

Keywords: Historiography, Sports History, Western Countries, Britain, India.



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Introduction

History is the past story based on the information of the people associated with it. But the activities of socialized people have various aspects, and not all aspects of these early-stage activities have been included in history. Since the beginning of history, the political activities of the people have been the main subject of historiography. The evolution and order of the content of history have been achieved through various debates and evolutions in different historical periods, as a result of which, with the progress of time, various areas of human society and human experience have been included in the institutional structure of history practice, making the field of history practice broad and rich. One of the most interesting and innovative fields that has been incorporated into the practice of history through this evolution is the history of sport. In the second half of the twentieth century, sports historiography began in Western countries. It was not too late to start this new style of history writing in India, too. The history of sports in India started in the late twentieth century. The beginning and evolution of sports historiography are important events in modern historiography.

Sports historiography in Western countries:

This effort to broaden the scope of historical practice throughout the twentieth century led to the inclusion of new areas of organized human life in history. As part of this larger process, the history of sport is also linked to the institutional framework of the practice of history. Historian E.J. Hobsbawm called sports one of the most important new social practices of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 2013). But sports have not been given enough importance in the framework of traditional historical studies. In the early stages, mainly anthropologists took the initiative to include sports in the framework of traditional knowledge (Sen, 2015). Edward Burnett Taylor, who is often credited as the father of anthropology, discussed various types of games in his essay “The History of the Games” written in 1879. American anthropologists James Mooney and Stewart Culin discussed the sports common among Native Americans (Blanchard, 2000). Frederic Paxson describes the role of sports as an important part of American society in his book “The Rise of Sports” (Paxson, 1917). “The North-American Society of Sport History” [NASSH] was established in 1972 to discuss sports in the United States, and since 1973, this organization has published a journal called the “Journal of Sport History”. Dutch historian John Huizinga discussed sports in his book “Homo Ludens” written in 1938 (Huizinga, 1960). In the 1960s, the French anthropologist Roger Caillios, opposing Huizinga's views on sports, presented his own statement on sports in the book “Man, Play and Games” (Cailliois, 2001). Sociologists Norbert Elias and Eric Dunning describe the development of sports as part of the civilizing process, stating that sports are a non-violent, non-military form that evolved from the violent, military competition of ancient societies (Elias & Dunning, 1986).

In the practice of sports history, as in the practice of the history of science, the idea was ingrained that only the player, or anyone associated with the game, can accurately present the history of the game. In opposition to this idea, historian James Walvin said, “Such claims to exclusivity are intellectually crippling and depend ultimately for their rationale on the belief that there is, or ought to be, only one particular approach or interpretation of historical experience. It is to be hoped that sports history will avoid such factional fights, although this is not to claim that sporting practitioners have nothing to tell us. Far from it. What is

quite clear, however, is that one does not need to be a player, spectator, or aficionado of any sport- to appreciate its broader social or historical significance.” (Walvin, 1984). From the second half of the twentieth century, sports history began to gain its proper place in traditional historical practice, and sports historiography emerged in Britain at an early stage. The practice of sports history in the Western world, including Europe, began in the 1970s and became especially prosperous in the 1980s because the practice of sports history gained an organizational form with the establishment of the “British Society of Sport History” in 1982. The research journal of this association of sports historians began to be published by Frank Cass Publications, which is now known as “The International Journal of the History of Sport”. Sociologists J.A. Mangan, Tony Mason, Allen Guttman, Richard Holt, and others study sports history, and because of their efforts, the field has become richer. The practice of sports history gradually spread beyond Britain to other European countries, such as Denmark, Sweden, and Finland, and sociologists from Asian countries, including China, Japan, and South Korea, also joined this effort in the late 1980s. One of the founders and promoters of sports history in Europe, J. A. Mangan's initiative, the “International Research Center for Sport, Socialization and Society” (IRCSSS), was established at the University of Strathclyde of Scotland, which was later transferred to De Montfort University in England. Under the editorship of J. A. Mangan, three research journals, namely “Culture, Sports, Society”, in 1998, “European Sport History Review” in 1999, and “Soccer and Society” in 2000, were published under “Frank Cass” publication, including the journal “Culture, Sports, Society”, which is currently published as “Sport in Society”. During this same period, a number of monographs and edited volumes were published under a series called “Sport in Global Society”, published by “Frank Cass”, which was later acquired by “Routledge” (Bandyopadhyay, 2019).

Although sports studies began in the United States at the beginning of the 20th century, the practice of sports history originated in Britain, as sports studies in the United States were based on the concepts and theories of physical education and sports science. In contrast, the practice of sports history in Britain was based on social history practice and related theory. The history of sport in Britain has seen different trends in its evolution. Changes and evolution in the content of sports history can be observed across different time periods, broadening the scope of discussion. In the first phase, sports history was influenced by British social historiography. The tendency to see and write history from below, in social historiography, extends to sports history, making class concepts and discourses central to sports history. Richard Holt describes the importance of sport as part of working-class culture. In the book *Sport and The British: A Modern History*, Richard Holt provides a detailed account of sport in the British Isles since 1800, in which he compares traditional sports, Victorian amateur games, and popular sports among the working class, and he also describes how sports are connected with empire, national identity, and violence (Holt, 1989). Historian Tony Mason, in his book “Association, Football and English Society, 1863-1915” has highlighted the game as part of working-class culture. He describes play as both a means of class control and a means of class expression. He shows that through the game of football, on the one hand, the administrators wanted to develop moral consciousness among the people and control their behavior, and on the other hand, it became the field of expression of the own consciousness of the players and spectators (Mason, 1980). Historian J.A. Mangan describes the practice of sport in Victorian and Edwardian public schools and how it became an integral part of middle-class and upper-class culture (Mangan, 2000). Historian J.

Hargreaves described sport as a sophisticated means of social control of the masses (Hargreaves, 1986). In the second stage, the influence of Marxism and economic history consciousness is observed on the practice of sports history. Historian Wray Vamplew, in the book “Play Up and Play Game” applied Marxian theory to the history of sports. According to him, although professional sports were organized on a commercial basis, they were not all about profit (Vamplew, 1988). In the third stage, historians engaged in the investigation of how self-identity develops through sports, that is, how regional and national consciousness is formed through sports. The description of how regional identity is expressed through sport has also become a subject of sports history in Britain, and a number of studies have examined sport at the regional level. In this regard, the historian Richard Holt said, “Supporting a club and assembling with thousands of others like himself, a man could assert a kind of membership of the city, the heart of which was physically and emotionally his for the afternoon.” (Holt, 1988). Similarly, how the national spirit is expressed through sports or how sports become a symbol of nationalism is also an integral part of sports history writing. In the case of Wales, the games of rugby and football emerged as a means of forming national identity against the unified umbrella of England (Johnes, 2005). Similarly, football became integral to the formation of national identity in Scotland (Jarvie & Burnett, 2000). Analyzing the deep link between British imperialism and sport in the fourth phase becomes an interesting area of sports historiography. For the servants of the British Empire, the sports of their motherland were a means of maintaining a connection with the culture of the homeland and a way of enjoying their leisure. At the same time, efforts were made to spread British sports in the colonies so as to develop the British spirit among the people of the colonies. Later, however, nationalism developed in the colonies around these sports and became a cultural arena for protest against British superiority (Mangan, 1992). The study of British sports history has mainly revolved around important sports such as cricket, football, and rugby, and the multiplicity of these sports can be seen in the study of sports history. Barring some exceptional instances, women's participation in sports has also been neglected.¹

Sports historiography in India:

The study of the history of sports in India has largely focused on the games practiced during the colonial period. The traditional knowledge practice framework is the first Indian research on sports we know of, dating back to 1988. That year, Soumen Mitra presented his paper on the role of football in colonial Bengal at the Jawaharlal Nehru University, where he described how the historic Indian Football Association (IFA) Shield victory by Mohun Bagan in 1911 became a symbol of nationalism (Mitra, 1988), which was later published as a book (Mitra, 2006). Since the 1980s, Indian historians and sociologists have studied the history of cricket, perhaps the most popular sport in India. Ramachandra Guha has discussed the game of cricket during the colonial period in several of his essays, showing how the game became a means of expressing anti-colonialism and nationalism. He shows that cricket was initially taken up by India's upper classes, but later it gradually became an integral part of Indian society and culture. However, his discussion mainly focuses on Bombay and Madras, and despite the fact that Bengal was one of the main and important centers of sports culture during the colonial period, he ignores it. Although he has given a remarkable account of the impact of cricket on the public mind (Guha, 1992; Guha, 1998). He also describes the history of Indian cricket in the book *A Corner of a*

Foreign Field (Guha, 2014). Mihir Bose in his book *The Magic of Indian Cricket* (Bose, 2006), and Ashish Nandy in his book *"The Tao of Cricket"* have highlighted the history of Indian cricket (Nandy, 2000). Mario Rodriguez describes the political life of cricketer Ranjit Singh, which illuminates the history of cricket in India to a large extent (Rodriguez, 2003). Edward Docker (Docker, 1976) and Richard Cashman have researched the history of cricket in India (Cashman, 1980). Boria Majumder describes the social history of Indian cricket in his book *"Twenty Two Yards to Freedom"* (Majumdar, 2004).

Several research articles and books have also been written on football, another popular sport in India. Historian Tony Mason, in his article, *"Football on the Maiden: Cultural Imperialism in India,"* analyzes the role of football in British cultural domination of India and highlights the role of schools established by the British in spreading football among the upper-class people of India. He shows that the British army, mainly stationed in India, introduced the game of football to relieve the monotony of the army camp, to maintain their physical strength, and to instill discipline. Various football competitions were started in India around these army teams, and these army teams dominated all the competitions (Mason, 1992). Boria Majumder and Kaushik Banerjee, in their book *Goalies: The Story of a Unique Footballing Nation*, highlight the interrelationship and tension between the national, provincial, and regional levels in Indian football and also describe the reflection of imperialism, nationalism, communalism, and commercialism on the football field (Majumdar, 2006). Attempts to explain the role of football in South Asian societies in the 21st century were also observed among Western historians. One of the most brilliant reflections of this effort is the book *Soccer in South Asia*, edited by Paul Dimeo and James Mills. The book contains several essays on Indian football, through which an attempt has been made to find out the reasons for the popularity of football in Bengal, especially in the city of Calcutta, and the history of football between 1880 and 1947 has been highlighted (Dimeo & Mills, 2001).

J.A. Mangan describes the arrival of Western sports in colonial countries, their background, and their evolution in his book, *The Games, Ethics and Imperialism*. According to Mangan, the British regime tried to make Indians loyal subjects to the British rulers by introducing sports like cricket and football in government and missionary schools and colleges. According to him, sports, especially cricket, were seen as an ideal means of spreading British ideals among Indians (Mangan, 2003). Ronojoy Sen, in his book *"Nation at Play"*, presents a series of descriptions of various sports in India from ancient times to the post-colonial era (Sen, 2015). The book *"Subaltern Sports"*, edited by James Mills, sheds light on the subaltern trends and participation in the history of Indian sports (Mills, 2005). Most studies on the history of sports in India have mainly been confined to two popular sports, namely cricket and football. But now some bright exceptions are being observed in this field, as a result of which important issues like India in the Olympics or India and the Commonwealth Games have also been included in the practice of sports history. Joseph Alter has done the most significant research on indigenous sports in India. In the book *"The Wrestlers Body"* (1992), he presented the history of wrestling in India, especially in North India, from an anthropological perspective (Alter, 1992). Another example of this trend is the book *"Olympics: The Indian Story"*, written by Boria Majumder and Nalin Mehta, which discusses various indicators of India's success in Olympic competition (Majumdar & Mehta, 2008).

In the 21st century, several research projects on the history of sports can be found at various universities in West Bengal. Kaushik Bandyopadhyay chronicles the history of Bengal football from Mohun Bagan's historic IFA Shield victory in 1911 to the 1980s in his research, highlighting issues such as nationalism, communalism, and provincialism through the game (Bandyopadhyay, 2008). Suparna Bhattacharya has described women's contributions in her research (Bhattacharya, 2007). Amitabh Chatterjee discusses the sports culture in colonial Bengal in his research work (Chatterjee, 2014). Debashis Majumder, in his research, highlights the development of football in Bengal between 1858 and 1990, although his discussion mainly focuses on Kolkata (Majumder, 2016).

Conclusion:

Although various types of sports have been practiced in human society since ancient times, their inclusion as a subject of history is relatively new. Sports are an integral part of the cultural life of any society, which characterizes that society. Denying the importance of sports in today's society makes it impossible to gain accurate knowledge of society and culture. In a globalized society, they have taken on an international form, encompassing economic, political, social, and cultural issues. The game became a symbol of communal, regional, and national conflict. Also, various social divisions and cultural characteristics are reflected in the game. Sports have also become important in the television, film, tourism, and labour migration industries. Even violent incidents and anti-social or illegal acts are seen to take place around the game (Jarvie, 2006). Sport has social, cultural, political, and economic significance that can only be adequately understood if we go beyond the framework of traditional leisure or entertainment and interpret its significance in the context of broader history and culture.

Notes:

1. Some of the texts that have discussed women's participation in sports- A. Guttmann, *Women's Sports: A History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), J. Hargreaves, *Sporting Females: Critical Issues in the History and Sociology of Women's Sport*, (London: Routledge, 1994), Fan Hong and J.A. Mangan, eds., *Soccer, Women, Sexual Liberation* (London: Frank Cass, 2005).

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International Relations under Xi Jinping's New Era: India's Strategic Options in the Indo-Pacific

Prosper Malangmei

Assistant Professor

Department of Political Science

Maharaja Bodhchandra College,

Manipur University,

Imphal, India.

Email: prospermalangmei@gmail.com

Abstract

In contemporary international relations, Indo-Pacific is a principal zone of strategic competition. In Xi Jinping's New Era, China is transforming the dynamics of regional geopolitics. In this contest, India holds a pivotal position as an emerging power and a cautious middle power balancing strategic imperatives. Thus, this paper applies Complex Interdependence Theory (CIT) to dissect strategic options available for India in the Indo-Pacific. CIT posits that in international politics, there are various means to interact, there is a lack of issue hierarchy, and there is a limited role of military force. This argument provides a foundation to analyse India's competing priorities. India's relations in the security domain are visible through the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad), and it maintains economic interdependence with China. As a middle power, India's strategy includes hedging, balancing, and diversification. India wants to avoid antagonising the United States and China and prioritises strategic autonomy. This would uplift India's growing function as a norm-shaper and institutional broker in the changing Indo-Pacific.

Keywords: India-China, Indo-Pacific, Xi Jinping, Complex Interdependence Theory, Strategic Autonomy.



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Introduction

The Indo-Pacific is becoming a hotbed of contestation in the present century. More than a geographical reimagination of the traditional Asia-Pacific, the Indo-Pacific signifies a paradigmatic shift in how global power is organised and contested, with the Indian Ocean gaining equal prominence alongside the Pacific (Das, 2019). The phrase is controversial because the United States (US), Japan, India, and Australia have institutionalised it through platforms like the Quad (Quadrilateral Security Dialogue) and the AUKUS (Australia, the United Kingdom, and the US), while China denigrates the idea as a containment policy against it. China favours the neutral phrase “Asia-Pacific”.

At present, China is distinctly marked as Xi Jinping’s New Era, giving prominence to the incumbent president. The new era is characterised by assertive diplomacy, institutional innovation, and an endeavour to change the world order by schemes like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). This recalibration of Chinese posture challenges the hegemony of the US and intensifies the geopolitical contest across the Indo-Pacific. In this complex strategic setting, India is an important actor, which is a middle power whose choices and options would influence the regional order.

Complex Interdependence Theory

In global relations, realism theory is founded on military power and zero-sum games, which offer a partial perspective to understand complexity in global politics. Especially, realism struggles to account for how states simultaneously cooperate and compete across multiple domains in an era of globalisation. Likewise, the challenges for India in the period of Xi Jinping’s New Era are a case in point, demonstrating a strategic dilemma. Currently, India faces direct territorial disputes and security concerns vis-à-vis China; it also maintains significant economic linkages and institutional engagements that constrain the use of outright military coercion. To explain such contradictory patterns, Complex Interdependence Theory (CIT), propounded by Keohane and Nye in *Power and Interdependence* (1977), provides a comprehensive analytical tool.

In the classical realism theory, the assumption is a state-centric international system in which military power and security concerns take the main role in decision-making. This contention is ill-suited to explain dynamics in the Indo-Pacific, where strategic contestation is ingrained in dense networks of trade, institutions, and transnational ties. Keohane and Nye’s CIT counters the realist paradigm by laying down three defining postulations. They are as follows:

1. Multiple channels of interaction exist, not limited to state-to-state relations but extending to transgovernmental and transnational connections.
2. No hierarchy of issues governs international politics; economic, environmental, and political issues coexist with equal salience.
3. Military power has a reduced role in determining outcomes among interdependent actors.

Applied to the Indo-Pacific, these beliefs illuminate why strategic rivalry persists but rarely escalates into direct confrontation. India’s relations with China embody this paradox. It is seen that India and China continue to maintain bilateral trade in spite of border tension and strategic mistrust. This evinces that strategic antagonism and economic reciprocity function simultaneously. Such bilateral relations cannot be explained adequately by realism because the relations are not solely dependent on the security aspect.

CIT identifies the dual nature of interdependence in global engagement. An economic dependence and institutional connection empower and constrain states at the same time. Interdependence exposes states to vulnerabilities while also creating incentives for cooperation. The US–China economic engagement is an example. The US hiked tariffs under the Trump 2.0 administration for Chinese products. In retaliation, China banned rare earth exports to the US (Hoskins & Sherman, 2025). This event is a reminder that interdependence has consequences for unilateral action. International relations are better off with negotiation rather than escalating it.

The same situation is seen in the India-China bilateral relations. India and China clashed at the frontier in 2020 at the Galwan Valley, but trade between India and China grew, exceeding US\$135 billion in 2022. This complexity substantiates CIT that economic ties block the use of military prowess. And decoupling is a costly proposition, even when political disputes are intense. Thus, the challenge for India is to mitigate vulnerabilities of asymmetric dependence on China while leveraging interdependence as a source of strategic advantage.

Keohane and Nye (2012) further extend CIT by identifying four interrelated models of regime change, each of which offers explanatory power for Indo-Pacific dynamics:

1. Economic process model: Regime change results from global market shifts. The Indo-Pacific in international trade, accounting for 63 per cent of world gross domestic product (GDP) and 46 per cent of commodities trade, demonstrates this logic (Ghosh, Sarkar, & Chaudhury, 2022). For India, integration into regional and global supply chains is an opportunity and a vulnerability.
2. Overall power structure model: Founded in realism, this model implies shifts in material capabilities. India has adopted a hedging approach in contemporary geopolitics, as the progress of China is imminent and the downturn of the US is accelerating (Waseem, 2023).
3. Issue structure model: India relies on foreign suppliers in industries like semiconductors, digital infrastructure, and rare earths. Although India's development in the IT (information technology) sector provides a strategic advantage. The securitisation of technology denotes that cooperation and conflict are issue-dependent.
4. International organisation model: Institutions influence state behaviour and expectations. ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) continues to curb conflict and promote inclusivity. Platforms such as the SCO (Shanghai Cooperation Organisation), BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa), and G20 reinforce India's adoption of strategic autonomy, making it possible to engage China in institutional settings while resisting bipolar alignments.

These models capture the features and pluralistic nature of Indo-Pacific politics. It provides an analytical mechanism for India to comprehend and diversify strategic options across economic, institutional, and technological domains.

The Indo-Pacific functions as a laboratory of complex interdependence, where strategic vying coexists with institutional entanglement. The behaviour of India constitutes an adaptive strategy employed by a middle power to stay relevant in great power rivalries. Instead of rigid alliance politics, India engages in selective institutional participation and economic diversification. India's membership in the Quad supports the US-led security forum. Also, India continues to engage in BRICS and the SCO, implying its refusal to subordinate autonomy to bloc politics. This strategic pluralism demonstrates CIT's argument that states do not operate in a single-issue hierarchy but manage competing priorities simultaneously.

Furthermore, India inculcates interdependence as a shield and sword. To cite an example, India is cautious of overdependence on Chinese imports. Also, India exploits its role in the global pharmaceutical and digital sectors as a form of counter-dependence. Such selective engagement reflects an understanding that vulnerability could be converted into a bargaining position, a hallmark of CIT.

India's foreign policy underlines the practical relevance of CIT in navigating Xi Jinping's assertive China. Three implications stand out:

1. Hedging and diversification: India strengthens security relations with the US via the Quad while retaining economic relations with China and institutional linkages with Russia.
2. Institutional broking: India uses its position in multilateral domains (G20 and BRICS) to shape norms and maintain influence without binding itself to rigid alliances.
3. Issue pluralism: India balances security concerns with economic imperatives, such as prioritising supply chain resilience and digital sovereignty while avoiding outright decoupling from China.

India is actively shaping global rules and connecting different international organisations. It is not a neutral country stuck between powerful nations. By accepting that it relies on others (interdependence) but also reducing its own weaknesses (vulnerabilities), India manages to make its own decisions (strategic autonomy).

International Relations under Xi Jinping's New Era

In 2013, Xi Jinping occupied the president's office, leading to a remarkable transformation in the external policy of China. Xi is attempting to redefine the status of China in global relations. Xi does not follow Deng Xiaoping's advice of "hide your strength, bide your time" and rather incorporates a strategy of assertiveness. The imprint of "Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era" at the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC) in 2017 signalled an official unveiling of "New Era". The doctrine defines China's confidence in projecting its power, institutionalising its centrality, and restructuring the international structure to address its political and ideological preferences (Rolland, 2020). Xi's foreign policy is neither reactive nor incremental. It is a calculated incorporation of geoeconomic statecraft with normative revisionism with an agenda to advance Chinese interests in international affairs.

The crux of Xi's major policy is the BRI, which was started in 2013. More than an infrastructure and economic programme, the BRI functions as a geopolitical tool crafted to embed China at the heart of global connectivity. The BRI intends to replicate the historical Silk Road by re-establishing a modern "PaxSinica". This would enable Chinese influence across different continents like Asia, Africa, Europe, and Latin America (Ferdinand, 2016). Chinese BRI investments crossed US\$1.175 trillion in 2024, with more than 150 countries joining the BRI and constituting ports, digital corridors, and transport centres (Wang, 2025).

The BRI achieves three targets. First, it externalises China's surplus capital and industrial capacity, thereby mitigating domestic economic pressures. Secondly, it creates asymmetric dependencies for states reliant on Chinese infrastructure. Thirdly, it creates political goodwill, enabling Beijing to institutionalise Chinese norms of connectivity and development. Thus, the BRI is a mixture of material and ideational power, a mechanism that enhances China's position without direct coercion.

However, for India, the BRI is a profound strategic dilemma. The South Asian countries have accepted the BRI, benefitting from the investments, whereas India is sceptical about the BRI, viewing it as a policy that is undermining India's influence. To corroborate, India is vehement in opposing the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) because it touches Pakistan-Occupied Kashmir (PoK), a contested area. This dynamic set a precedent that China disregards sovereignty issues while advancing its national interests.

Apart from Xi's foreign policy as materialist, it is equally rooted in an ideological project. The China Dream, projected as the “great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation”, connects domestic legitimacy to international restoration of status (Li & Yuan, 2021). This civilisational narrative provides the normative basis for the BRI to position China as a developmental actor at the centre of global order.

Through what Xi calls Major Country Diplomacy with Chinese Characteristics, Beijing promotes multipolarity, rejects Western universalism, and seeks to institutionalise pluralism in global governance. Rather than aligning with traditional alliance systems, Xi prioritises flexible partnerships and regional mechanisms that accommodate Chinese preferences. This orientation is prominent in the Indo-Pacific, where Beijing interprets US-led initiatives like the Quad and AUKUS as containment strategies (Singh, 2023). At the same time, Xi advocates respect for sovereignty, non-interference, and mutual benefit in order to project China as a possible option to the US-dominated liberal structure, appealing to states in the Global South in particular.

The problem for India lies in the ideational domain. On the one hand, India has a common interest with China in multipolarity and resistance to hegemonic dominance. On the other hand, China's framing of sovereignty clashes with India's territorial integrity, especially in border disputes. Thus, Xi's ideological grammar generates convergence and contestation, complicating India's foreign policy calculus.

Xi Jinping's foreign policy demonstrates a dual-track approach combining inducements and coercion. On the inducement side, Beijing promotes establishments like the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), which now counts 110 member states and provides a corpus of US\$100 billion for development financing, and the Digital Silk Road, which exports Chinese technology and digital standards across the developing world. These initiatives promote the image of China as a responsible country while expanding its influence through economic means.

Correspondingly, Xi has deployed coercive tools to attain the agenda. Chinese military activism in the South and East China Seas, cyber operations, and trade retaliation, like sanctions on South Korean industries after the deployment of THAAD (Terminal High Altitude Area Defence), an air defence system, are messages that China would not hesitate to punish states that challenge Chinese core interests (Kim, 2022). And the combination of “bullying and beneficence” (Blackwill & Campbell, 2016) represents a strategy that maximises advantage without resorting to direct confrontation.

The pressure is visible on India. Beijing merges economic interdependence as India heavily imports from China, and with military pressure on the Line of Actual Control (LAC). This juxtaposition of inducement and duress is the strategic environment under which New Delhi must operate. In such a political atmosphere, opportunities for cooperation coexist with persistent vulnerabilities.

Xi Jinping has also repositioned China as an advocate of globalisation and multilateralism, albeit on Chinese conditions. Xi, at the World Economic Forum in 2017 held in Davos, defended open markets and criticised Western protectionism, casting China as a custodian of globalisation (Parker, 2017). At the APEC (Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation) Summit in Peru (2024), Xi condemned the decoupling narrative as an artificial disruption of supply chains. Although this commitment is not based on liberal institutionalism, rather, it is a reflection of strategic multilateralism, a selective acceptance of institutions designed to readjust global rules to embed Chinese preferences.

This creates a paradoxical environment for India. On one hand, platforms like the G20 and BRICS allow India to collaborate with China on global issues. On the other hand, Beijing's selective multilateralism constrains India to rely on institutions as neutral arbiters. Thus, Xi's selective strategic multilateralism generates challenges for India, and it has to balance cooperation with caution.

China is a revisionist country in the eyes of Western countries with an intention to dismantle the liberal international order (LIO). But Xi's strategy is better understood as reformist. China has benefited from existing interdependence structures of LIO, in particular trade regimes, financial institutions, and global supply chains. Because of these reasons, China seeks to reform rather than overthrow the present LIO (Rühlig, 2018). The New Model of Major Power Relations, propounded by Xi, reflects this inclination: China does not aim to replace U.S. hegemony with its own but rather to dilute unipolarity and institutionalise a more symmetrical, culturally plural system (Cheng, 2016).

This reformist agenda has consequences for India. Although a diluted unipolarity where the US plays a diminishing role could create space for India's strategic autonomy, there is a possibility that China would prioritise its interests if it remains uncontested. This probability reinforces the necessity for India to hedge and adopt selective alignments.

Xi has also centralised foreign policy decision-making, transforming the Chinese diplomatic apparatus into an extension of CPC ideology. For example, Wolf Warrior diplomacy has assertively defended the Chinese narrative, and coordinated norm-challenging initiatives are not a digression from mainstream but systemic manifestations of centralisation (Loh, 2018). Beijing has politicised diplomacy that could be deployed swiftly in response to economic, discursive, and military crises. Thus, it enhances China's capacity to project legitimacy, especially in the Global South.

This institutional centralisation amplifies unpredictability for India. In contrast to the preceding Chinese leaderships that had prioritised pragmatism, Xi's diplomacy frequently intertwines ideology and strategy, reducing the area for compromise and cooperation.

Along with the BRI, Xi's New Era has four flagship initiatives:

1. The Global Development Initiative (GDI), started in 2021, which parallels and bolsters the UN's 2030 Sustainable Development Goals. It appeals to developing countries by focusing on infrastructure development and poverty alleviation.
2. The Global Security Initiative (GSI), announced in 2022, promotes a cooperative, indivisible, and non-aligned principle of security, which opposes alliance-based security approaches.
3. The Global Civilisation Initiative (GCI), introduced in 2023, gives a clarion call for mutual respect among civilisations and rejects the imposition of values by other nations. Cultural relativism needs to be respected.

4. The Global Governance Initiative (GGI), launched at SCO 2025, proposed sovereign equality based on multilateralism.

These initiatives, in combination, provide an alternative to Western LIO. It is an expansion of China's normative footprint and institutional reach around the globe. They present risks and opportunities for India. India's participation could enhance its status in rule-making, but acquiescence risks legitimising China's position in influencing norms.

India's Strategic Options

Xi Jinping's presidency has introduced a new period of assertive external policy for China. It is reshaping the geopolitical balance of the Indo-Pacific. Xi's vision under his "New Era" is attempting to combine geoeconomic expansion, civilisational narratives, and institutional activism to question the US-dominated LIO and reform world order in a way that would be conducive to Chinese interests. In this context, India, which is neither a hegemon nor a small state, occupies the position of a middle power, beset with strategic constraints and opportunities. Thus, India's strategic options need to be understood as responses to assertive China and the renewed interests of the US in the Indo-Pacific. India has adopted balancing or bandwagoning, as well as employing a multidimensional approach that blends autonomy, coalition-building, and institutional engagement.

Traditionally, strategic autonomy is the foundation of the external policy of India. Strategic autonomy is flexible, enabling New Delhi to avoid entrapment in major power rivalries while maintaining room for manoeuvre. It is seen that in the Indo-Pacific, India's action is a conscious act of embracing ambiguity in order for New Delhi to hedge from the uncertainties of Chinese action without committing to rigid alliances (Prasad, 2019). This feature forms the identity of India's middle power, which thrives on issue-based alignments and selective partnerships rather than binary choices.

This approach is salient in Xi Jinping's New Era, in which China projects inducement and coercion equally. In this case, India interprets Chinese strategies like the BRI as tools of geopolitical dominance; however, it also resists being fully subsumed into US-led counterbalancing coalitions. Therefore, strategic autonomy becomes a shield against overdependence and a resource for diplomatic flexibility for India.

A central strategic option for India lies in coalition-building. India's membership in the Quad alongside the US, Japan, and Australia signifies a middle-power strategy. The ascent of Xi Jinping has magnified the importance of Indo-Pacific coalitions. It has driven India closer to like-minded countries (Panda, 2020). The Quad prioritisation of maritime security, technological cooperation, and supply chain resilience implies India's willingness to engage in "soft balancing" mechanisms.

The coalitional dimension also extends to minilateral formats such as India–Japan–Australia trilaterals. The strategic relations between Japan and India are a convergence of interests between middle powers aiming to cushion China's rise (Kaura&Kumawat, 2021). These partnerships soften the burden of counterbalancing and bulwark the middle-power rationale of influencing through network building. In the Indo-Pacific, it is necessary that India negotiate the current geopolitical reality without alienating the US and PRC.

India's discernment of China is neither monolithic nor static. While India acknowledges the difficulty of complete disengagement. The insight on China as a rival as well as a necessary

partner defines India's ambivalent strategic calculus (Panda, 2021). The contemporary economic interdependence, geographical contiguity, and multilateral forum engagement are factors that keep the relations intact despite border disputes and maritime discordance.

This ambivalence illustrates the complexity of India's middle-power strategy. India's position is neither purely containment nor full accommodation but a dynamic resistance and engagement. Thus, it moves beyond realism's binary logic, accepting a form of pragmatic pluralism to tackle Xi's assertiveness.

The strategic engagement of India across the Indo-Pacific expands its options beyond the US-China dyad. Xi Jinping's presidency has tightened its hold on world governance initiatives. This has compelled India to respond by strengthening its web of strategic networking. New Delhi's linkages with the US, Japan, Australia, ASEAN states, and even smaller Pacific nations are an example of what has been described as an "allies in the making" trajectory (Lin, 2024).

Such partnerships could be viewed as neither ad hoc nor symbolic. It represents an emerging architecture of economic and security cooperation that thwarts the asymmetries between India and China. To illustrate, India's maritime collaborations with Australia and its infrastructure initiatives with Japan diversify its strategic toolkit. These strategies buttress the legitimacy of a rules-based architecture. These engagements disclose the middle-power method of "networked balancing" rather than reliance on singular alliances.

The Indo-Pacific is a central theatre for security calculations of India, especially as Xi's assertiveness manifests in border standoffs and maritime expansion. India has been unprepared to deal with China's assertive diplomacy, revealing the urgency for recalibration (Pant & Rej, 2018). The 2020 Galwan Valley clash is an obvious case of India's limitations in defence posture. In this context, India's security strategy involves both capacity-building and external partnerships. India is aware of China's expansive military power, and therefore, it is making investments in naval modernisation and expanding defence ties with the US. Concomitantly, India is avoiding ceding strategic autonomy by formalising alliances. India prefers to remain a pivotal but independent actor in determining Indo-Pacific security.

Also, India's strategic options extend to multilateralism with other middle powers. As Soeya (2020) argues, the Indo-Pacific elicits middle-power activism. Nations like India, Japan, and Australia have critical roles in advancing rule-based architecture. Furthermore, India's involvement in ASEAN-led institutions demonstrates the trend of enabling it to participate in normative contestation without direct confrontation with Beijing.

The agency of middle powers is situated in their ability to transmute the environment through incremental rule-setting, institution-building, and coalition politics. India's diplomacy is an example. Like in the sectors of maritime norms, digital governance, and supply chain resilience. India, by aligning with middle-power strategies, is leveraging its position to increase its voice in changing the regional structure beyond great-power binaries.

India is engaging in programmes like the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI) to counterbalance China's dominance through inclusivity. India is projecting itself as a responsible middle power by building partnerships with states wary of overdependence on Beijing. This is India's strategic game plan of "competitive institution-building" as a medium to influence the regional order.

This structural rivalry between India and China is becoming prominent under Xi. The Chinese presence in Sri Lanka, Pakistan, and the Maldives threatens the traditional sphere of influence of India. This creates a serious security problem for India (Narvenkar, 2025). India is reacting to China's inroads in its backyard by increasing investments in regional diplomacy and infrastructure development. India is engaging with sovereignty and transparency as counter-narratives to China's debt-driven loans.

Nevertheless, India faces dilemmas in balancing assertiveness with restraint. India wants to avoid confrontation risks, and at the same time, excessive accommodation would marginalise India's interests. The middle-power status of India restricts it from imposing unilateral decisions. India has to carefully formulate a policy that oscillates between deterrence and diplomacy. The fragility of strategic options in Xi's New Era exists because power asymmetries limit unilateral efficacy but provide opportunities for multilateral relations.

Apart from material competition, India is engaged in ideational contestation with China. Xi's narrative on civilisational centrality and rejection of liberal universalism contrasts with India's advocacy of pluralism and democratic norms. In this regard, India views China as a normative challenger along with a geopolitical rival. Thus, India's strategic options constitute promoting its democratic identity as a spring of legitimacy and soft power.

The ideational contest is visible in the discourse of India on freedom of navigation in the oceans, sovereignty, and inclusivity. India is seeking to establish itself as a normative counterweight to China's narrative by installing its pluralistic values in international relations. This is the significance of narrative power, which forms a part of India's strategic repertoire.

India's strategic options in the Indo-Pacific under Xi Jinping's New Era can be synthesised into four broad pathways. First, strategic autonomy is a flexible tool to hedge against Chinese coercion and the US's dominance. Second, coalition-building permits India to utilise middle-power networks to balance China's rise without formal alliances. Third, competitive institution-building positions India as a provider of alternative governance models in response to China's initiatives. Finally, normative contestation enables India to use its democratic identity in moulding the Indo-Pacific order.

Conclusion

In the Xi Jinping New Era, the international politics in the Indo-Pacific is a paradox with interdependence amid intensifying strategic rivalry. These tensions translate into concrete dilemmas rather than abstract theory for India. India's strategic behaviour cannot be reduced to realist binaries of balancing or bandwagoning; instead, the prism of CIT better explains the coexistence of rivalry and cooperation influencing the choices of India.

The ethos of strategic autonomy persists to guide the external policy of India. But it has evolved from equidistance to adaptive manoeuvrability within asymmetric interdependencies. This is substantiated by participation of India in coalitions like the Quad and the IPOI, demonstrating autonomy as a flexible instrument. It enables India to hedge against Chinese assertiveness without subsuming itself under US-led alliances. This is the middle-power logic of enhancing its agency by shaping collective bodies and distributing the burdens of regional stability.

India's membership in Chinese-led (BRICS, SCO) and alternative (Quad, IPOI) institutions exposes a dual strategy of "competitive institutionalism", in which participation and contestation coexist. The institutional pluralism contends that multilateral platforms are arenas of

normative struggle instead of neutral cooperation. Concurrently, India's reliance on democratic pluralism and sovereignty constitutes an ideational counterpoint to China's civilisational narrative.

India's hybrid strategy, combining autonomy, coalition-building, institutional brokering, and normative engagement, illustrates how middle powers tacitly handle complex interdependence. In this interdependent setting with Xi's New Era, it has limited and expanded India's strategic scope. The assertive new era has compelled India to act as a pivotal balancer and structure-changer. Finally, the prospect of order hangs on India's calibre to transform interdependence into influence, asserting agency via adaptability in uncertain global politics.

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The Dual Edge of Tourism in Darjeeling Himalaya: Economic Growth vs Environmental Cost

Vinay Limbu, PhD
Assistant Professor
Department of Geography
Muralidhar Girls' College,
Kolkata, West Bengal, India
Email: vinaylimbu233@gmail.com

Abstract

Darjeeling, nestled in the Eastern Himalayas, is a popular tourist destination in North Bengal, India, known for its beautiful scenery, pleasant climate, and cultural richness. However, the rapid development of the tourism industry is causing serious environmental concerns in this region. This study is an empirical analysis of tourism development in the Darjeeling hills, integrating qualitative and quantitative data to assess its complex impact. The paper explores the major tourist attractions, evaluates their sustainability, and examines the complex relationship between economic benefits and environmental degradation. Findings reveal that while tourism contributes significantly to local income generation and employment, it simultaneously exerts pressure on natural resources, waste management, and fragile ecosystems. The study concludes with recommendations to promote sustainable tourism practices that balance economic development with ecological preservation in Darjeeling.



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"The traveller sees what he sees, the tourist sees what he has come to see."

– GK Chesterton

1. Introduction

Darjeeling stands as a tranquil hill station in the northernmost part of West Bengal. Characterised by its pristine natural environment, the scenic paradise offers affordable tourism. The undulating slopes and rugged terrain of the Darjeeling Himalayas allow the development of many plantations' estates with the world-famous Tea brands. These hundred-year-old Tea gardens received a Geographical Indication tag in 2003. The hill stations of Darjeeling, Kurseong, and Kalimpong were established as colonial outposts for leisure in the late 1800s (Dey & Choudhury, 2024). Darjeeling's reputation as a summer hill station dates back to the British colonial era, when the Britishers sought to reconstruct the cool, misty environment of their homeland for its picturesque landscape. Since then, Darjeeling, as the "Queen of Hills," has become a cherished region bringing substantial tourism and tea revenue. Post-Independence, Darjeeling remained a favoured retreat for wealthy travellers from the plains, drawn by its pleasant climate and scenic beauty, and to this day it has been an attraction for tourists seeking recreation and retreats.

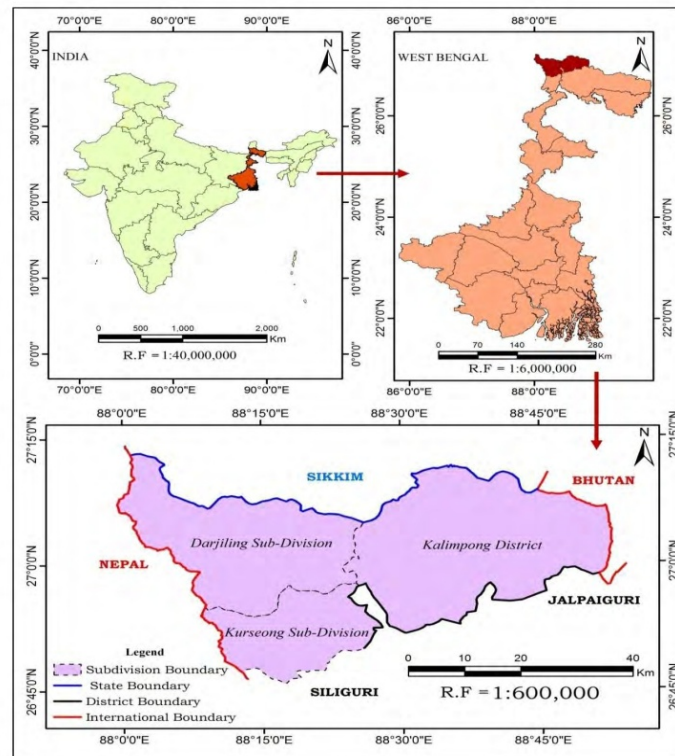
1.1 Rationale of the Study

The four important 'T's - Tea, Timber, Toy Train, and Tourism are the focal economic drivers of the Darjeeling hills. A substantial part of Darjeeling's development depends on the revenue generated from these sectors. Tea, Timber, and the Toy Train are also key components of the region's tourism industry. The present study aims to examine and understand the impact of these indicators as important elements of economic growth, and to explore the crucial role of tourism in improving the livelihoods of local people. The study also considers both social and economic perspectives, and assesses the environmental challenges affecting the Himalayan environment of Darjeeling and its adjoining areas.

1.2 Location of the Study Area

The Darjeeling district is located between the latitudinal extent of 26°31' and 27°13' north and the longitudinal extent of 87°59' and 88°53' east, with a total area of approximately 1,200 square miles. Darjeeling is the main town and administrative headquarters of the district, located at 27°3' north latitude and 88°16' east longitude (Dash, 1947). Darjeeling derived its name from the Tibetan words *dorje* and *ling*—*dorje* meaning "the precious stone" symbolizing the thunderbolt of Sakra (Indra), and *ling* meaning "place."

Thus, Darjeeling is interpreted as "the place of the dorje," referring to the mystic thunderbolt of the Lamaist religion. This name originally referred to the Buddhist monastery that once stood on Observatory Hill (O'Malley, 1907). Geographically, the district looks like an inverted triangle, with its base touching the state of Sikkim. Darjeeling extends from the mountainous terrain of Sikkim in the north to the low-lying plains of West Bengal in the south. It is strategically positioned between the neighbouring countries of Nepal and Bhutan. Several mountain ranges and rivers mark the boundary between Darjeeling and Sikkim (Rawat, 2022).

Figure 1: Location Map of the Study Area

2. Materials & Methods

2.1 Review of Literature

There is a wide range of literature available on the various aspects of tourism in the Darjeeling Himalaya and its adjoining areas. Dutta and Mukhopadhyay (2023) advocate for homestay tourism as a sustainable model to address the problems of overtourism and environmental degradation. Bhutia (2015), in his article, stresses the unplanned growth, poor infrastructure, and a handful of stakeholder engagement as major barriers to sustainable tourism, urging significant community participation. Bhattacharya (2014) opines that seasonal surges in tourist numbers strain municipal infrastructure, particularly in waste management, water supply, and transportation. The Darjeeling Chronicle (2023) worries about the unregulated tourism growth, reporting that over 70% of locals depend on the sector, which intensifies cultural pressures and environmental problems in the fragile Himalayan ecosystem. Rawat (2022) presents the broader picture of Sustainable rural tourism in the Darjeeling hills, emphasizing the development of tourism in the context of social, physical, and environmental factors. Ghosh and Mondal (2021) provide experiential evidence that eco-friendly practices and hospitality in homestay tourism significantly increase tourist satisfaction, thereby strengthening the potential of sustainable tourism.

2.2 Aims and Objectives

1. To explore the various dimensions of tourism development in the Darjeeling Hills.
2. To highlight the major tourist attractions and assess their impact.
3. To understand and examine both the positive and negative aspects of tourism.

2.3 Methodology

The present paper is based on empirical observations from various reports, journals, and online journals. Relevant literature was reviewed, and required assessments were conducted through personal observation at key locations. Information was gathered from news reports and from interactions with local individuals actively engaged in the tourism sector. The current tourism scenario and its impact on human resource development were analysed using secondary data and insights from the stakeholders and tourists' experiences. The collected data was also cross-verified through field experience to ensure reliability.

3. Development of Tourism Industry in Darjeeling

Tourism is widely recognised and considered as one of the leading and fastest-growing sectors. Tourism serves as a dynamic source of revenue and livelihoods. In recent years, the tourism industry of the Darjeeling district has experienced outstanding growth. In Darjeeling, tourism is one of the largest earners of foreign exchange after the tea industry (Limbu & Chettri, 2014). The months of March and December see many tourism activities in Darjeeling. The first peak season, which occurs from April to June, not only attracts a large number of foreign tourists but also boosts the local economy. The second season spans from October to November, during which domestic tourists, especially from other parts of West Bengal, visit the region. Despite various adverse effects of tourism on this small hill area, it remains a chief source of sustainable livelihood strategy for the local people. According to the Darjeeling tourist bureau, more than 400,000 people from across the country and around the world visit the area annually. The tourism sector in Darjeeling still holds immense potential for further development. With proper planning and effective management, this potential can be harnessed to boost income generation and promote regional development (Rai, 2020). The Development of Tourism in Darjeeling Himalaya can be examined and outlined from three developmental phases. The Colonial era, Post-Independence, and the Present (Sharma, 2012).

3.1. The Colonial Era (1835 – 1947)

The establishment of Darjeeling as a Summer capital or Sanatorium by Captain Lloyd in 1835 marked an important landmark in the history of Bengal. Darjeeling not only served as a summer capital but also treated invalid soldiers from the European war during the severe malaria outbreak in the Bengal plains. The arrival of Colonials not only changes the cultural setup but also alters the very geography of the place. The favourable climatic conditions allowed them to start Tea plantations on an experimental basis from 1840 to the establishment of the Tea Industry as a commercial enterprise in 1856 and the Planters' Club in 1868. The Tea estates rose in number from 113 tea gardens in 1874 to 148 tea gardens in 1905 (O'Malley, 1907).

Since then, Darjeeling has gained global popularity and is recognised as the Queen of the Hills. The introduction of the narrow-gauge railway is another iconic contribution of the Colonials, and it remains one of the most prominent attractions for tourists, offering a joyful ride. The Darjeeling Himalayan Railway, also known as the Darjeeling toy train, is one of the prides of India and a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The introduction of railways allows the inflow of people, boosting tourism in the regions. The Dak Bungalows were constructed for the officers and their families. The development of hotels around Darjeeling dates back to 1839, when the first hotel opened with 12 cozy rooms. The Wilson's Hotel was opened up in a two-

storied building with eighteen rooms. Thereafter, many hotels opened, including Nelson, Woodlands, Rockville, Bellevue, and Mount Everest (Sharma, 2012). The opening of missionary schools also promotes tourism in Darjeeling. Today, these schools cater to both national and international students. The Independence of India ended the colonial era, but its legacy remains in the arts and architecture of Darjeeling, boosting tourism and tea revenue.

3.2 Post Independence period (1947 – 1988)

The arrival and departure of the colonials in Darjeeling have left their impression and legacy in the form of art, culture, and architecture. The end of the colonial era in 1947 left a strong imprint on Darjeeling. This ancient architecture and heritage have made this area a tourist hotspot. The region's economy remains centred on tea, timber, and tourism. Since independence, tourism has grown rapidly, especially with the development of infrastructure and promotion by the Indian Government, including the formation of the Indian Tourism Development Corporation in 1965, followed by the West Bengal Tourism Development Corporation in 1975. The formation of the West Bengal Tourism Development Corporation in the Darjeeling hills brought systematic, more organised tourism. In the 1980s, new tourist destinations such as Mirik and Mangpu were developed to reduce pressure on the traditional visiting hubs of Darjeeling and Kalimpong. Adventure tourism, such as rafting and trekking, has also developed.

In 1988, the creation of the Darjeeling Gorkha Autonomous Hill Council, following political turmoil in the Darjeeling Hills, marked a shift in tourism administration, as responsibility for tourism development was transferred from the West Bengal Tourism Development Corporation to the hill council. The growth of tourism in Darjeeling in this period has come with inevitable consequences. The clearance of forests for hotels and roads disrupts the ecological balance. The expansion of urban areas has increased landslides and worsened water shortages (Sharma, 2012).

3.3 Present Status from 1988 onwards

The creation of the DGAHC in 1988 witnessed the unprecedented growth of the tourism sector until 2007. However, the resurgence of political instability in late 2007, driven by the statehood movement, led to a sharp decline in tourist arrivals. This downturn severely impacted the tourism industry and other economic sectors in the region, leading to an all-time low (Sharma, 2012). The establishment of the newly formed Gorkhaland Territorial Administration in 2012 renewed the setback to tourism with an initiative to support the local economy through homestays and offbeat destinations. Infrastructural improvements include the redevelopment of dilapidated popular sites. In 2019, official records show that the region welcomed 7.5 lakh domestic tourists and 42,000 international visitors. The Darjeeling Tourism industry suffered a setback during the pandemic. But in recent years, Darjeeling and its adjoining areas have been overwhelmed by tourists during the peak season and have struggled to accommodate the surge. The influx of tourists is significant for the growth of the local hospitality industry. Media reports in April noted that every hotel in Darjeeling was operating at full capacity (Telegraph 2025). But at the same time, the mounting pressure of overtourism is taking a toll on the region's fragile ecosystem and the lives of local residents. Currently, there is an urgent need for sustainable tourism development through proper management and effective administrative intervention.

3.4 Trends of Tourist Inflow in Darjeeling Hills

The Himalayan town of Darjeeling and its adjoining areas have been experiencing a considerable increase in tourist arrivals in recent years. The growth of tourism can be understood from the following facts.

- The increasing number of hotels from 68 in 1980 to 280 in 2010 to 1294 certified hotels and Homestays in 2025 (As per Darjeeling District Police Administration)
- The capacity of beds was 850 in 1980 and increased to 9,000 in 2010.
- The arrival of tourists has increased every year.
- The number of registered vehicles in Darjeeling has multiplied from a mere 10317 in 1995 to 22665 in 2009 (Sharma,2012).

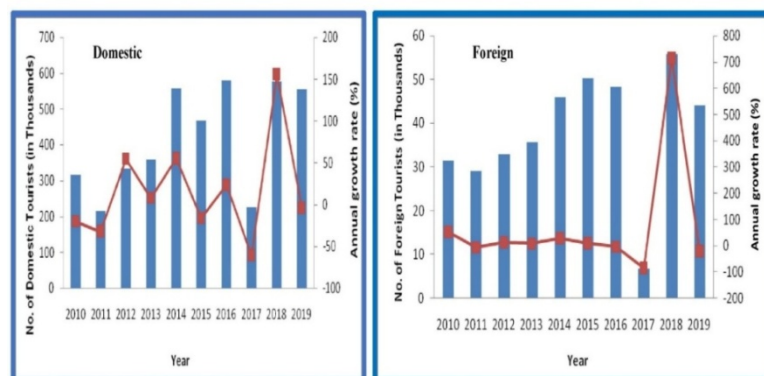
Table 1: The Arrival of Tourists in Darjeeling Hills (2001 – 2010)

Year	International Tourists	Domestic Tourist	Total Tourists
2001	11,100	242,986	254,086
2002	12,350	249,032	261,382
2003	18,700	284,315	303,015
2004	18,090	261,596	279,686
2005	27,218	415,901	443,119
2006	30,394	460,764	491,158
2007	29,669	444,253	473,922
2008	26,346	359,258	385,604
2009	23,819	342,813	366,632
2010	27,218	372,741	399,959

Source: Tourist Bureau Office, Darjeeling & Sharma (2012)

From Table 1, it is seen that tourist arrivals have surged, with total visitors rising from around 2.5 lakh in 2001 to a peak of nearly 5 lakh in 2006. Though this growth rate was not consistent, tremendous declines occurred in 2008 and 2009 due to political turmoil over the Gorkhaland movement and negative media coverage. Domestic tourists, particularly from various parts of Bengal and India, have consistently outnumbered foreign visitors, and their growth trend is more pronounced. Despite setbacks, the overall trend shows an increase in tourism, supported by a rise in registered vehicles and improved connectivity during the developmental phase of 2001 to 2010 (Sharma, 2012).

Figure 2: The Trend of Domestic and Foreign Tourist Inflow in Darjeeling



Source: Tourist Bureau Office, Darjeeling

As per the reports and records administered from the Tourism Department of West Bengal, the trends clearly show (Figure 3) the surge in tourists' arrivals in Darjeeling. It indicates the arrivals of both domestic and international tourists. The rising trend of tourists' arrivals is between 2010

and 2019. The highest influx was 632637 tourists in 2018 (Figure 3), of which 553862 were domestic, and 44057 were international visitors. The annual average growth rate of all kinds of tourists' arrivals grew to 17 % during this period. It has been observed that the rate of domestic tourists' arrival has increased from 372741 in 2010 to over 5.5 lakhs in 2019, averaging nearly 16.5% annual growth during that said period. Whereas, the international arrivals of tourists have also risen from 27218 in 2010 to 44057 in 2019, averaging around 70% annual growth during 2010-2019 (Sharma 2012 & NIHE Report 2022).

3.5 Tourism resources of the Darjeeling hills vis-à-vis Economic growth

Nature has endowed the Darjeeling hills with splendid scenic beauty and charm. The mesmerising valleys of Tea gardens, majestic snow-clad mountain dominating the skyline, rivers, and lush green forests of pines offers great attractions to tourists. These natural resources provide various outdoor activities to the tourists. It also provides employment opportunities to the locals by providing services to the tourists. The Darjeeling Himalaya stands tall with its natural bounty. The offbeat destinations lure tourists for their scenic corridors and exquisite trails, trekking to National parks like Sandakphu in Singalila National Park, birdwatching in the wildlife sanctuary, and river rafting have always been a tourist craze. The most notable and outstanding vantage tourism spots are present in the different parts of the districts.

3.6 Darjeeling Himalayan Railway & Economic Growth

The Himalayan Railway of Darjeeling, commonly referred to as the "Toy Train," is a narrow-gauge railway with a track width of just 2 feet (610 mm). It runs between New Jalpaiguri and Darjeeling, connecting the low-lying plains of Jalpaiguri with the hilly town of Darjeeling. The Darjeeling Toy Train, known for its iconic steam engines, has been operating since 1881 to till date. It has preserved its original charm and heritage. In the last 14 years, there has been a consistent growth in revenue of the Darjeeling Himalayan Railway. In 2010–11, it made just ₹60 lakhs, but by December 2023, it had made ₹19 crores, which is almost 30 times more. This growth shows that more and more people are interested in visiting DHR and that it is important to the economy in the area. The significant decline was seen in the years 2020–21 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This shows how heavily DHR relied on tourism and resulted in a brief setback. Fortunately, the railway recovered swiftly. By 2029–2030, it is estimated that revenue may reach ₹25.74 crores if the present patterns continue. Therefore, the overall financial health of DHR demonstrates its significance to Darjeeling's tourism-driven economy and the need for long-term diversification and management (Lama, 2024).

3.7 Tiger Hill

Tiger Hill is one of the most popular tourist spots in Darjeeling. Every day, thousands of people come to see the famous sunrise views of Mount Kanchenjunga. A three-storey observatory has different features, and tickets cost between ₹10 and ₹40. The number of tourists steadily rose from 2011 to 2016 and reached over 2.3 lakh in 2014–15. But the visitor also had a bad experience due to poor facilities, not enough staff, and too many people. Even so, its beautiful scenery and easy access still draw tourists from different countries and from within the country. Tiger Hill's recreational value and potential for making money could be greatly improved by better management and infrastructure (Rai, 2020).

3.8 Tea Garden Tourism

Darjeeling is home to some of the oldest tea gardens, which date back to the colonial era. Today, estates like *Ging*, *Goomtee*, *Selim Hill*, *Singtam*, *Glenburn*, and *Makaibari Tea Estate* tucked in the misty hills have opened their doors to tourism, blending tea culture with colonial heritage and hospitality. This plantation area, where the climate favours the luxuriant growth of tea with aroma and flavour, brands Darjeeling tea globally. Old colonial bungalows, once lived by planters, have been restored into charming guesthouses, furnished with antiques and offering meals made from organic produce grown on the estates. The locals host homestays, providing visitors with a glimpse into traditional village life and livelihood. It is also one of the sources of income generation. Thus, tea tourism is considered to be a significant contributor to the local economy by creating jobs, promoting sustainable growth, and preserving cultural heritage (Sharma & Bhowmick, 2016).

4. Positive Impact of Tourism in Darjeeling Hills

Tourism has generated both direct and indirect employment opportunities in the Darjeeling hills. It emerged as a vital engine of economic growth, sustainable development, and livelihood diversification. Tourism in Darjeeling leads to the growth of different sectors like adventure tourism, hospitality, handicrafts, and especially homestays. Local communities have benefited significantly from the influx of tourists through homestay tourism. Rural tourism has completely transformed rural areas such as *Sittong*, *Makaibari*, and other far-flung remote areas into one of the best offbeat destinations (Ahmed & Chattopadhyay, 2016; Roy & Mitra, 2017).

Tourism led to increased income opportunities like tour guiding, food services, and craft-making (Das, 2020). Tourism plays an active catalyst in promoting cultural preservation by supporting traditional arts, crafts, festivals, and religious practices, as seen in the Darjeeling Carnival (Ghosh, 2018; Negi, 2005). Singalila and Neora Valleys enhance environmental awareness, supporting biodiversity conservation and community stewardship of natural resources through ecotourism (Chakraborty & Mazumdar, 2019; Bhutia, 2021).

Additionally, tourism has fostered balanced regional growth by developing satellite destinations such as *Mirik*, *Tekdoh*, and *Lamabhatta*, thereby easing urban pressures on Darjeeling town (Das, 2020). As a multifaceted tool for inclusive development, tourism in Darjeeling represents a strategic convergence of economic, cultural, and environmental interests when supported by sustainable planning and community involvement.

5. Negative Impact of Tourism in Darjeeling Hills

The Darjeeling hills offer diverse tourism experiences in the Eastern Himalayas. It is a renowned hill station for tea tourism, trekking, toy train rides, bird watching, nature-based tourism, forest safaris, and wellness tourism. The annual tourist influx of around 4.5 lakh visits the Darjeeling hills because of these attractions. The tourism industry has contributed to the regional economy (Das & Roy, 2016). Tourism supports local livelihoods, but its unregulated and unplanned expansion has led to significant environmental degradation (Rai, 2020).

5.1 Unplanned Urban Expansion

Rapid tourism has triggered the infrastructure expansion with the construction of multi-storeyed buildings and the widening of roads. The expansion and construction of urban buildings are replacing the vegetation with a concrete jungle (Sharma, 2012; Biswas & Pal, 2016). Limited land

availability within municipal boundaries has resulted in vertical construction that violates the height restrictions act. These unplanned developments in Darjeeling are altering the iconic landscape, obstructing views of Mt. Kanchenjunga and the Tea gardens.

5.2 Vegetation Loss

Deforestation is one of the most crucial environmental challenges associated with the rapid development of tourism in Darjeeling. Moreover, fuel wood collection and the clearing of land for constructing roads, hotels, and other infrastructure directly contribute to forest loss (Banu, 2019). The increasing effect not only fragments the forest habitats but also threatens biodiversity and diminishes the ecological services provided by forests (Banu, 2019).

5.3 Urban Sprawl

The loss of vegetation for the settlement, along with the development of the tea and tourism industry, marked the development of urbanisation or urban sprawl in the Darjeeling hills. The hilly town of the Darjeeling district has witnessed the growth of the urban population and structures. It has been observed that the population growth rate of Darjeeling town has increased from 1970 onwards at the district level (Banu, 2019). In addition to this, the town has to support the floating population of 20500 in the form of tourists, students, visitors, and wage earners (Chhetri & Tamang, 2013). Thus, the unplanned urbanisation and over-tourism have an adverse impact on the fragile environment.

5.4 Water Scarcity

Darjeeling town faces chronic water scarcity. The main water supply is sourced from two lakes built for 25,000–30,000 residents during the colonial era, and now serves nearly 200,000 people. The lakes derive water from 26 springs in Senchal Forest (Ghatani, 2021). The lack of reservoirs, aging infrastructure, and delays in the Balasun project worsen the water crisis. Despite receiving abundant rainfall, residents often buy expensive tanker water, costing ₹900–1000 per 5000–6000 litres. It is due to poor storage facilities, which leads to massive water wastage. Tourism further aggravates the water supply, with hotels forced to ration water. Darjeeling's water crisis continues to affect both the tourism industry and locals without sustainable management and storage. The excessive demand for water by hotels and tourists intensified water scarcity, forcing hotels to purchase water from private suppliers during peak seasons. During the tourist season, on average, each hotel is forced to buy around 2-3 tankers of water every day (Merinews, 2013). The total demand for water in the Darjeeling town is 75 lakh litres per day, while the total supply is 24 lakh litres per day with a deficit of 50 lakh litres per day (Jana and Tamang, 2017).

5.6 Solid Waste Management Crisis

Solid waste management is one of the main problems of concern in Darjeeling. The hill areas daily produce heaps of solid waste of 50 tons approximately, but only 62% is disposed of properly. Darjeeling municipality alone generates about 66.38 MT/day of waste (Limbu, 2014). The region lacks adequate treatment and waste segregation facilities. Therefore, during the peak tourist season, the daily waste production is doubled without any proper disposal. The composting is limited, and the central facilities like bio methanation units are absent, which makes the situation worrisome. (District Environment Plan, 2021).

6. Conclusion

Tourism is one of the most important economic pillars in the Darjeeling Hills. It contributes nearly 30% of the region's business and revenue generator. The Darjeeling region, with its scenic beauty and natural charm, attracts approximately 4.5 lakh domestic and 50,000 foreign tourists every year. The tourist influx boosts the local economy, generates employment, and increases demand for local products. However, in the peak tourist season, it puts immense pressure on local infrastructure. Water Scarcity, traffic congestion, deteriorating municipal services, and a lack of proper tourist accommodation are the major problems creating a chaotic situation. Unregulated and rapid urban growth, with the rise of hotels, shops, and restaurants, has led to the destruction of Darjeeling's scenic beauty. The felling of trees to accommodate expansion has disturbed the region's ecological balance. Despite these challenges, tourism is one of the main economic supports alongside tea and timber. The natural beauty, diverse culture, rich heritage, and unique biodiversity attract tourists, but with the lack of proper management and sustainability, environmental safeguards are at risk. The rampant deforestation, pollution, and waste management are threatening the health and hazards. Though ecotourism and rural tourism have gained some momentum in recent years, the core essence of sustainable tourism is neglected, resulting in overtourism. As tourism in Darjeeling is largely seasonal, it exposes the economic vulnerabilities. Many people are left unemployed in the off-season. Therefore, to safeguard both the environment and the local economy. There is an urgent need for well-planned and executed Tourism development policies prioritizing the ecological aspects, local economy, and livelihood strategies.

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The Meaning of Life: Transformations of Meaning from Human to Posthuman

Priyanka Basak, PhD

Post-Doctoral Fellow

Indian Council of Philosophical Research,

New Delhi, India

Email: basakpriyan@gmail.com

Abstract

Human beings are social individuals. They live their lives with certain social codes and conduct. They carry a meaning of life, which helps them live peacefully in society together with other individuals. But difficulties occur when the question arises, 'What would be the meaning of life?', and 'How do we decide the true meaning of life?'. Again, in the 21st century, rapid enhancements are taking place in the human sphere through science and technology. Such advancements outrun the humanistic approach, giving rise to a new phenomenon known as posthumanism. Hence, one primary concern that arises is: 'Will the meaning of life in the humanistic approach and the posthumanistic approach be the same or not?' However, we can observe that, due to an excessive bent towards technology and its advancements, the meaning of human life is gradually changing day by day. Therefore, this paper explores the meaning of life and the differences between the humanistic and posthumanist approaches to it.



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Introduction

Humans are essentially an evolutionary being. The evolution process depends on the beginning of life. Life is not meant to be lived only, but rather the meaning of life signifies a worthwhile life, a system of living. This system of living has gone through continuous changes from ancient times to the present day. But human life is facing rapid transformations in the 21st century. The boundaries of humans' physical, social, and spiritual lives are blurring nowadays. We are aware that, from tradition, our society maintains certain rules and regulations to make human life worth living. Human beings always convey their own intrinsic values, which make them different from other creatures. This intrinsic value is nothing but human reason. Besides the reason, some sets of moral values and ethical principles are given to human life to enrich it with its true meaning. Although ethical codes and moral guidelines are dynamic. For that, we can see moral obligations are in constant change. How far humanity goes, morality finds its new and reformed paths. So, the moral obligations of traditional thought sometimes seem inappropriate in this new era. The meaning of a good life, a life full of worth, is not only associated with ethical codes and conduct but also with humans' own knowledge, thinking capacity, physical and mental health, and, overall, a style of living. To find a new way to understand the meaning of life, posthumanism challenges traditional humanist assumptions of being unique and exceptional. Science and technology offer immense opportunities to enhance human beings, while posthumanism critically analyzes how humanity can redefine itself in light of such advancements and what the place of human beings will be in the world.

Human, Technology, and a New Form of Life

Humans have believed in a supernatural being that controls our Universe, our World, and our lives since ancient times. This supernatural being is sometimes depicted as God or the Supreme Soul. Humans are the combination of both a material body and an immaterial soul. The body is changeable, being material in nature, mortal, and it deteriorates over time. But the soul is changeless and immortal. Humans always strive for eternal life. Hence, they are in a continuous quest to achieve eternal life. For centuries, various spiritual beliefs have led people to believe in the 'afterlife'. To follow this path to the afterlife, human beings live their lives in accordance with religious practices, so that the life of an individual can continue beyond biological existence. So, the concept of 'immortality of the soul' or 'reincarnation' gives our lives fundamental value and meaning. To understand different socio-political and cultural transitions throughout human civilization, several socio-political and cultural transitions have created various types of rituals, traditions, practices, and ethical frameworks depending on the concept of 'human dignity', 'human morality, value, or worth'.

Science and technology focus on the meaning of life by describing empirical facts about human well-being and by relating the 'why' of human biology rather than the natural 'how'. Biologically, the meaning of life for humans stands in the fundamental instinct to survive and transmit genetic information. From a biological standpoint, a successful meaning of life is defined as when humans systematically organize themselves to reproduce offspring, evolve over time, and prolong these processes. Technology offers various advancements that can help humans pursue happiness and well-being. When such happiness and well-being are united with humans' basic needs, the meaning of life for humans turns into self-actualization. Scientific and

Technological advancements carry the offshoot of humanism, i.e., transhumanism, in which, with the help of technology, human beings are enhanced and can overcome human limitations, such as mortality. Transhumanism suggests that a meaningful life would be one in which, through enhanced physical and cognitive capacities and extended life, traditional human problems could be solved.

In the recent period, despite the eternity of the soul, human beings strive to maintain the timeless existence of their bodies. Such desires give rise to a new contemporary philosophical ideology, known as 'Transhumanism'. Transhumanism focuses on the enhancement of human abilities, physical immortality, radical life extensions, and even the resurrection of humans with the help of intensely developed technologies and medical sciences. This ideology, which was only a prediction and a dream in an earlier stage, has now become a reality and is opening before the world under the name 'Posthumanism'. Posthumanism is a remarkable transformation that changes the identity of the human body. Humans transform their identity from only a 'biological human' to a 'technological posthuman'. Some recognize posthumans as different from normal human beings, whereas some prefer to admit posthumans as a being that contributes to long-term human survival. Basically, posthumans are not out of this world; they are very much a part of our society. They play as a medium between the organism and technology, the real world and the virtual world, social relations, and cyber relations. Thus, biology, technology, and social characteristics are all aspects of a posthuman. As technology plays an important role in our everyday lives, it becomes vastly possible for us to achieve a posthuman life. The craze for technology in daily life changes the entire scenario of human existence.

Ethical Concerns Regarding Changing Ideology

The rapid development of scientific knowledge and its technological applications inevitably affects human culture, society, and life in many ways, as well as challenging traditional understandings of human goals. Some philosophical and ethical questions arise when advanced technology keeps a biological body alive, even when consciousness and human mental capacities (such as rationality, self-awareness, and free will to make decisions) no longer exist. As consciousness is described as the general criteria of humanity since tradition, so the ethical questions regarding the quality of human life come to the forefront, like: 'What kind of life is worth living for?', 'If the rate of human mortality decreases, then how would the fair distribution of scarce resources be possible?', 'How would an individual hold his human dignity, individuality, self-interest, free will, and personhood?'

However, new technological movements bring together science, technology, society, and cyberculture, traditional and futuristic points of view, on the grounds of morality, rationality, emotions, ethics, materiality, spirituality, and bodily and mental enhancement. Thus, the new technological renaissance is moving away from the dualistic worldview and gradually bringing every concept under one umbrella of posthumanism. It has been mentioned earlier that rapid technological advancements and random uses of technology challenge traditional thought, and that moral values, ethical codes, and social structures are lagging. The global economy and consumer culture are two other aspects that make technological improvements more powerful and sustainable in the recent world order. These two aspects encourage people to think only about 'I' and 'here and now', rather than about the 'cause-and-effect' chain that would help them

consider the wider, radical social and ethical consequences of their every action. Individual choices expand their territory in the issues of birth, death, and life as well. Though consumerist culture seems to emphasize individual choices, in the end, it falls into a pseudo-individualistic culture. Even though it presents superficial choices and choices that are made from copying others, not one's own free will. However, sometimes an individual's unique idea seems illusory because human beings are now influenced by the collectivist ideals of life enforced by science, technology, market policies, and fashion industries. However, a concern about existential risk and the potential loss of meaning in life runs alongside technological upgradation. Technological advancements and the emergence of AI provide immense shortcuts for humans; as a result, humans tend to stay far from personal growth and self-discovery. On the other hand, human labour in every field of life is equally replaced by technological developments and AI. But,

Scenario of the Recent Era

Despite all such dilemmas and criticisms, it can be said that posthuman enhancement has opened a new horizon for human life. The aim of human beings of the 21st century is techno-centric. In the process of self-perfection, the stages of human life are gradually blurring. Global economy, cosmopolitan culture, medicine, fashion trends, and changing social atmosphere encourage individuals to strive for similar norms and ideals. Now, younger people want to look more mature, elderly people want to look ageless, and want to be active like younger people through bodily enhancement. Dark people want to be fairer, and fairer people want to look more beautiful than before by means of cosmetic transplant. Disabled people remove their disabilities through medical sciences. Through all these medical, cosmetic, technological, and scientific applications, we are forming a world of almost 'identical clones'.

Human beings' intense physical transformation through technology necessarily affects the nature of their existence. Human enhancement makes people more self-oriented. They are in a continuous striving for attaining personal success, which is entirely materialistic in nature. The achievements that human beings attain are merely measured through the acquisition of money, power, and prestige. However, such an insatiable desire for life achievements, career growth, and economic success constantly changes human values and morals. The lives humans prefer to choose nowadays set them apart from their real lives and hand them lives that are more like machines. Consumerism is the basis for the change in the concept and characteristics of a good life, and as a result, new economic policies of liberalization and globalization are emerging. The norms of sensuous pleasures, the fulfilment of unrestricted self-desires, and the acquisition of utmost comfort and luxury become the new goals of life.

Nowadays, Humans are trying to overlook natural human inclinations and the values of life. Human values, such as morality, aesthetics, friendship, trust, spiritual thinking, love, family bonding, helping others, and duties, are gradually being compromised by uncontrolled desires for material values. An economic upbringing and comfort, as well as the enjoyment of pleasure, seem important in life and are somehow required. However, these can never be the ultimate goal of life; they might be important components of that goal. Human inclinations and life values should be considered as life goals. However, components, by gradually removing human inclinations and life values, place themselves as humans' ultimate desired goal. For example, it could be said that human values such as friendship, love, bonding with others, and selflessness

are gradually being replaced by the rising respectability of selfish individualism. People are guided by the principles of wish fulfilment and self-happiness. No one is attentive towards others, neither to their own family, loving persons, and friends, nor to society. People only care about one quarry, i.e., 'what is in it for me?'. Today's people are very attentive and cautious about their advancements, achievements, and success. Having such a progression, people undoubtedly use their family, friends, loved ones, and relationships merely as a means. Hence, this becomes the reality of today's world, and it seems impossible to escape from it. Although people are trying to improve and modernize their skills, talents, and knowledge, they are neither doing so to prepare themselves, nor to become good individuals, nor for the sake of building a good society, but only to hold themselves for the opportunities of gaining possible personal advantages. The matter of concern is that such self-seeking, ambitious, and career-oriented professionals are becoming the ideal among the young generations of society. They come into existence as they seem to fulfil young people's virtues, like motivation, competitive spirit, goal-orientation, and so forth, through their highly talented skills and knowledge. Unfortunately, in a society full of selfish individuals, those who refuse to sacrifice their principles and true values of life for the achievement of so-called material values and happiness are becoming odd in a progressing society, and hence they have become a 'vanishing' human clan.

Changing Ideologies from Human to Posthuman

The standard of human life is the basis of all ethical debates and concerns. What should be the quality of human life? How can one decide the standard of human life? How can one make a good life? What would be the minimum standard to be a life worth living? These questions are present in every era, in every concept. Posthumanism is not free from this. Regarding posthumanism, it can be said that, before the advancements in human physical aspects, human intelligence was tied to the physical body only. Being finite in nature, the human brain cannot be expanded or transferred. The ideas and thoughts of other humans' brains cannot be known by us. But, with the help of technological advancements and artificial intelligence, in the near future, it seems possible to transfer the human mind to a computer disc. After such enhancement, our physical or biological body would no longer signify the limitations of our existence. The future is near where human existence as a bodily form could be converted into virtual reality, situated in a super-intelligent computer. But if the human mind is transformed into a virtual reality in a super-intelligent computer, then who would be the master? Who would maintain the operating systems? Whose mind would be copied to the computer, and what would be the basis of such transformations? If everyone's brain is transformed into virtual reality, then who would be left there to be a pure biological human? The answers to such questions are yet to be found. It is vital to note that rapid technological advancements in the human sphere will gradually transform human understanding of knowledge, space-time, spirituality, and the physical and mental forms of existence. The traditional dualistic interpretation of material and immaterial forms of existence is being replaced day by day with a holistic view of the universe, where the collective foundation of universal consciousness is the primary concern.

Posthumanism, by criticizing anthropocentrism, argues that technological shifts and integration decentralize human beings and blur the boundaries between humans, animals, and machines. Anthropocentrism is a concept that upholds the view that human beings are distinct

and superior to all creatures that live in the world. Hence, the meaning of life is designed accordingly to an anthropocentric way. However, after decentering human supremacy, it could be reconsidered that meaning is not solely a human project. The meaning of life should be regarded as a web of existence which, in its true essence, is larger than the human sphere, as well as interconnected with both human and non-human agents and systems. The technological enhancement gives rise to several technological integrations, among which 'cyborg' is prime, which offers a new hope to human beings. Cyborg, being a 'cybernetic organism', an amalgamation of both human flesh and machine, helps to understand the self as a hybrid entity. Hence, in light of such changes, the meaning of human life needs to be reconceptualized. For such an upgradation in human life, the meaning of life is not solely found in fixed human identity, but rather it can be found in the creative enlargement of human and non-human relationships. Posthumanism advocates ethical rationality across both human and non-human life forms. As human beings are gradually enhanced with the help of technology and build a new life-form, the re-evolution of responsibilities should be revisited. Posthumanism promotes the idea that the true meaning of life emerges through mutual relationships rather than human dominance, priority, or supremacy.

Conclusion

Based on the above observations, it can be said that, at present, everyone acts primarily for their own benefit. The well-being of society often comes after personal well-being. Selfishness suppresses responsibility. The meaning of life remains alive merely as a word for achieving goals, not as a set of performances of one's own duty intended for society. The thought that leads everyone is, 'what is good for me is the only good'. They care less about the fact that their own good may not be suitable for society. Personal goodness and well-being become the main issue. Hence, through this egoistic thinking in relation to oneself and personal success, utmost chaos, tyranny, disorder, dynamism, and disruption take place in society. In society, there remains no harmony, friendly behaviour, loving relationships, or static value at all. In the 21st century scenario, the ideal of the modern age, 'Greatest happiness of the Greatest number', has changed its nature to 'Personal happiness'. Everyone carries an attitude that portrays them as always right in their own actions, decision-making, thinking, and way of progressing, and thus, sometimes the laws of society break down in order to render proper judgment to humanity. No one performs their duty for the sake of society, but wants their rights, equality, and freedom from society. Due to an excessive egoistic nature, one's achievements never become fully accomplished for the greater good. In the concluding remark, it can be stated that people live in a society where the ego empowers over all. People live apart because they dislike any kind of relationship with society and even with others within it. Extreme egoistic individualism is becoming the new norm in society, and earlier norms such as community, companionship, and fellowship are gradually being replaced.

Ultimately, it can be said that nowadays the meaning of life has undergone many changes, and an immense shift towards technological developments is making it quite complex and multilayered. The posthuman trend in life is situated in a position where it will one day free humans from all their mental and physical incapacities. The meaning of life would not be associated solely with reason, production, and human-centeredness; rather, it would be served

through self-actualization, such as creativity and personal growth. It is true that AI has recently occupied most of the world's functional knowledge. Nevertheless, the true meaning of life can be found uniquely in human attributes, such as creativity, relationships, consciousness, art, creativity, and compassion. However, what humans would like to do is up to them. The challenge is here. Humans either have to take on the challenge and utilize their unique human attributes along with technological enhancements, or they must be passive observers of technologically mediated lives. No one can deny that the present-day society belongs to a techno-scientific age. Hence, rather than questioning like, 'what does it mean to be a human?', and 'what would be the true meaning of life?', we must accept the truth that humans are evolving day by day, and the meanings of human life are also evolving and changing with both technology and ourselves. The posthuman development has broadened the scope of human existence. This broadened human existence suggested that the meaning of life is not restricted to human experience only. Human consciousness is defined solely by biology in the posthuman era. An enhanced human form or a cybernetic organism, i.e., the cyborg, can recognize life's vision and purpose more inclusively, as biology and technology are both integrated parts of the posthuman.

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Entrepreneurial Turn of the Indian Publishing Industry: Assessing the Arrival of Literary Agents and Marketing of Literature

Aditya Ghosh, PhD

Assistant Professor

Faculty of Liberal Arts,

ICFAI University

Tripura, India

Email: adityaghosh164@gmail.com

Abstract:

The paper attempts a critical study of the entrepreneurial turn in the Indian publishing industry at the turn of the twenty-first century, with a special focus on the emergence of literary agents and the marketing of literature. It examines the proliferation of literary agency, the rising popularity of literary agents, and the construction of celebrity among authors, agents, and publishers in India. The paper further evaluates their significant contribution to the expansion of the professional setup, the incorporation of business strategies, and the adoption of promotional tactics in the Indian publishing industry. Literary agents have been instrumental in bridging the gap between an author's artistic merit and maximizing the economic potential for authors, publishers, and associated sponsors. Literary agents are a new phenomenon in the Indian publishing industry, and this paper discusses why they are an absolute necessity and integral part of the flourishing of Indian commercial fiction. They guide commercial authors, promote their books, and strategize marketing campaigns for authors and their works. The paper critically examines how literary agents carefully navigate the direction of authors in the current context, when they must not only pursue artistic excellence through cultural production but also ensure a healthy commercial prospect to sustain and flourish.



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Keywords: Literary agent, publishing industry, Marketing strategy, literature, economy.

Introduction

The book publishing industry in India has come a long way. It is now considered one of the largest global markets, producing close to 90,000 titles a year, generating crores in revenue, and providing livelihoods to thousands of employees. Various stakeholders, including editors, publishers, reviewers, sponsors, and readers, have played a significant role in the unprecedented growth of this industry. They have duly been part of academic discussion for this reason, but “no figure is more influential - and less studied by scholars - than the literary agent” (McGrath, 2021). Literary agents are representatives of independent literary firms or “self-employed actors who work for and with authors to place their manuscripts advantageously with publishers in a particular national or linguistic setting” (Norrick-Rühl and Razakamanantsoa, 2023). Literary agents assume the responsibility of editors, business advisors, and legal counsellors for authors. They provide “editorial feedback on manuscripts” in preliminary stages of draft development, “often manage author royalty payments” while developing promotional guidelines and marketing strategies, and they also “handle contract negotiations with publishers for territorial, language, and subsidiary rights” (Noorda 2025). The concept of a literary agent is a relatively new entrant in the vocabulary of an established ecosystem that revolves around well-recognized terms such as author, reader, editor, and publisher. The concept emerged from a necessity of the time, a demand of the neoliberal world order in which the recognition of art and its flourishing depend on the commercial prospects it can generate. Literary agents have become a vital cog in the commercialization of the book industry by bridging the gap between an author's artistic merit and maximizing the economic potential for the author, publisher, and associated sponsors.

Emergence of Indian Literary Agents:

In 2012, Westland offered a record sum of 5 crore as an advance to Amish Tripathy, a young author at the time, and it created a stir in the Indian media because Tripathy did not even have a concept for what he would write when the sum was offered to him. The Indian publishing industry had never made such a significant advance to any author, which is reflected by the words of Westland's CEO, who claims “it's the largest advance we've ever paid, and the largest Indian deal” (Wire, 2013), and what is more startling is that this whopping advance is offered to a commercial writer. Indian authors were previously offered massive advances. However, they had all been literary writers, and mostly international publishing companies acquired the rights: “previous advances that made waves are a reported £1million (approximately Rs. 8 crore) for the worldwide rights to Vikram Seth's sequel to ‘A Suitable Boy’, and a Rs. 97 lakh pay-outs for seven of historian Ramachandra Guha's books, both by Penguin. In 2007, Amitav Ghosh reportedly received about Rs 55 lakh for his Ibis Trilogy, and Nandan Nilekani Rs 25 lakh for ‘Imagining India’” (Wire, 2013). Ananth Padmanabhan, CEO of Westland, credits the changing landscape of Indian publishing, along with new readership and the emergence of writers with diverse tastes, for the economic health of the Indian publishing industry. The hullabaloo regarding Amish Tripathi points to a significant transformation of the Indian market, with certain emerging scenarios: the rise of literary agents, entrepreneurial output, and the marketing of literature in the Indian publishing industry over the last 10 years. It must not be forgotten that Amish Tripathi's first fiction, *The Immortals of Mebula*, was rejected multiple times by publishers, and it was Anuj Bahri, a literary agent working for Red Ink Literary Agency, who helped to get

the book published. Anuj has played a pivotal part in securing the recent massive deal with Westland, too.

Although literary agents have been an integral part of the publishing industry in the West for a long time, in India, literary agenting is a recent phenomenon. Jacaranda, established in 1997, is considered the first literary agency in India. The floodgates of literary agencies opened in 2007, when Renuka Chatterjee established Osian's Literary Agency and Mita Kapur founded Siyahi in Jaipur, setting the journey of literary agencying in India. Red Ink Literary Agency and Sherna Khambatta Literary Agency also made their mark by representing several high-profile bestselling authors in the years ahead. Young Kanishka Gupta, who predominantly handles debutant authors, established Writer's Side in 2010. Shruti Debi, who has extensive experience working with Picador India, founded The Debi Agency (Reyzer, 2023). In the past five years, Anish Chandy has founded Labyrinth Literary Agency, Dipti Patel has established Word Famous Literary Agency, and Lalitha Ravindran has started First Forays (*All About Book Publishing*, 2020).

Literary agenting as a profession has only flourished in India over the last few years. Unlike in the West, the Indian publishing industry was not organized, and professionalism in this field was lacking until 10 years ago. Literary agenting did not have recognition or economic reward. Kanishka Dutta, the founder of Writer's Side, opines, "In India, literary agents are just about beginning to come into their own. For a long time, one could not have imagined making a living as an agent here because of the money involved: the advances usually ranged from zero to a princely Rs 10,000. Publishers acquired all their books by reaching out to potential authors directly or through references from their existing authors and journalist friends" (Gupta, 2016). In post-millennial India, there has been a rapid proliferation of authors due to the flourishing of commercial fiction and the increased young readership. There has been an increasing tendency among people in contemporary India to become bestselling authors. Publishers are flooded with innumerable manuscripts every day, and the majority of the manuscripts' "quality is mostly terrible" (Santhanam, 2016). That is why the importance of literary agents is increasing more than ever. "Agents are kingmakers" (Gupta 2016) because they "mediate between publishers and authors" (Santhanam, 2016), and they are absolutely necessary for authors since they have knowledge about the publishing industry, the pulse of readership, and they look after the promotion and administrative works like managers. According to Jeet Thayil, "a literary agent is a blessing, since s/he is responsible for all the nitty-gritty administrative work, including the tedious follow-up required in signing a book deal, releasing precious time for the author to focus their energies on a constructive and creative output, rather than be exhausted by paperwork" (Rose, 2012). Jaya Bhattacharji Rose further elaborates on the significant role an agent plays and why they are slowly becoming indispensable in the contemporary, busy Indian publishing industry. She argues:

An agent has specialist knowledge of different publishing houses and is aware of the personal tastes of editors and is able to sell written material to them, matching the writer with the right stable. Agents are also able to provide an author a range of services – reading a raw manuscript, assessing if it is fit for publication, if it is then helping them tidy it up before selling it to an appropriate publisher or if there is interest from more than one publishing house, setting up an "auction" and selling it to the best bidder, negotiating terms and contracts and collecting payments and royalties. Today, agents are expected to be a filter between the publisher and the

writer but also be the author's agony aunt and professional advisor, rolled in one. They also network with agents and publishers in other territories, across the world — ensuring that the book gets published across the globe, and increasingly in different languages. (Rose, 2012)

Literary agents work day in and day out to promote authors and their books. They play a massive role in the creation of celebrity status and in the publicity of authors. They guide authors to stay afloat on social media and remain relevant; they edit manuscripts, offer valuable suggestions for shaping them, find suitable publishers, and, most importantly, negotiate economic deals. Manju Kapur, the founder of Siyahi Literary Agency, spells out the primary objective of her agency:

Siyahi works in tandem with the publishers to ensure the best publicity for the books we represent. This includes liaising with the publishers for a detailed-oriented marketing and promotion plan for the books, and constant follow-up with the publishers to ensure its execution. We suggest authors for various national and international festival. We also cross promote our titles and authors on our social media pages. Siyahi also works towards the dramatisation, film rights for our authors' works. We work with film agents, to pitch for creative film and television adaptations, and are also in direct touch with leading independent and mainstream production houses. We actively help production companies source authors and books that fit the genres they are looking to work in. (*All About Book Publishing*, 2020).

Historical Growth of Literary Agents:

Literary agents help popularise an author and their body of work through active promotion and maximise the author's economic health through appropriate negotiation. However, literary agency is only 150 years old, and before the advent of agency, authors had to resort to other methods to reach their audience. Homer chanted "his verse to the assemblies of nobles and warriors" (Woodcock, 1982), and they were his only target audiences at his time. With the development of civilization, the concept of writing emerged, opening a new perspective. By the time Pindar, Simonides, Sappho, and Anacreon arrived, the process of writing for the purpose of storage in books had started deviating from the earlier tradition of only oral citation. Although the method and purpose of poetry writing differed at this stage, they mainly wrote for a small audience, which comprised their patrons, and they could not, even in their wildest dreams, think about selling a number of copies and making an economic fortune.

Publishers appeared only after the advent of printing technologies. Prior to that, "manuscripts were copied and passed on", which was a laborious and time-consuming work, and "writer lived, if he had no means of his own, mainly by the patronage of rich or powerful men. From the distribution of his actual works he earned little, if anything" (Woodcock, 1982). Once the middle class started achieving economic prosperity, and literacy grew, mass readership increased along with the mass production of books. At this point, the significance of literary agenting came into existence. Writers needed someone to help them get their manuscripts to publishers, and publishers, on the other hand, needed agents to avoid the buildup of unwanted trash manuscripts. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, literary agents made their presence felt as their demands grew.

A. P. Watt is considered to be the first person who assumed the role of literary agent towards the end of the nineteenth century, at the insistence of his friend George MacDonald, when he requested Watt to promote his stories. Watt was a professional advertising agent, and he quickly sensed the future promises of literary agenting when MacDonald urged him to promote his book. He grabbed this opportunity and soon started promoting himself as a literary agent. According to John B. Thomson,

He began by charging his clients a fee for specific tasks but soon decided to switch to the system he used as an advertising agent, charging a 10 per cent commission on the money earned by his clients for the transactions he completed. For two decades Watt had the field pretty much to himself, and by the end of the nineteenth century he was representing some of the leading writers of the time, including Walter Besant, Thomas Hardy, Rudyard Kipling and Arthur Conan Doyle. (Thompson, 2012)

His success as a literary agent encouraged other notable literary agents of the time- Albert Curtis Brown, J. B. Pinker- to pursue this profession. To this point, publishers enjoyed unprecedented autonomy and believed in dealing with authors in person. Authors had to live at the mercy of publishers because they could dictate who would be published and who would not. Moreover, because the authors lacked knowledge of the economics of book publishing, publishers could get away with exploiting authors at the negotiation table.

The emergence of literary agents changed this practice, and agents started diluting the publisher's autonomy. Watt, Brown, Pinker in England, and Henry Holt, Paul Revere Reynolds in America changed the game altogether, and the power of publishers and the authors had been brought into balance, albeit authors, with the help of agents, started wielding more power as time went by. Mary Ann Gillies writes, "they challenged the existing hierarchy: they threatened the power and authority of publishers and editors; they helped writers in their quest for empowerment; and they participated in the creation of new literary marketplaces" (Gillies, 1993). By approaching multiple publishers, literary agents often started bidding, and the book was published by the publisher who would offer more money. It drove the economy of book publishing upwards, and authors ended up earning more money. Although initially publishers could resist this practice of agents, they slowly had to give in for the fear of lagging behind other competitors. Publishers also had a tough job to do by maintaining a fine balance between producing quality literature and making enough profit to stay in the business. In pursuit of this balance, the relationship between authors and publishers stumbled at times, but it was not more than a part of business as usual. Siegfried Unseld elaborated on the tough job of publishers of the time:

The discontent that rises to the surface from time to time in the relationship between author and publisher is due to the strange, Janus-headed nature of the publisher's activity. He must both produce and sell the book, that "sacred commodity" as Brecht called it. That is, he must combine intellectual stature with business acumen so that the person who writes literature can make a living and the one who publishes it can remain in a position to publish it. Alfred Doblin put it this way in 1913: "The publisher casts one eye on the writer, the other on the public. But the third eye, the eye of wisdom, rests unflinchingly at the cash register". (Woodcock, 1982)

Changing scenario of the Book publishing industry on the arrival of Agents:

Literary agents perform “three basic business functions: valuations of publishing businesses; sales of serial, translation, and foreign rights for editors and publishers; and sales of literary property for writers” (Gillies, 1993), along with assessing the quality of manuscripts. Literary agents not only take care of authors but also manage to keep a healthy relationship with publishers, and at times, they negotiate rights deals with other publishers on behalf of any particular publisher. Having said that, it must be noted that literary agents work primarily as clients of authors, so they always prioritize the interests of authors. Literary agents, according to Curtis Brown, stand

between the author and the publisher, and he ought to uphold better than either of them the importance of the greatest truism in trade, viz., that no bargain is ever really sound and honest without being profitable to both parties to it. If the agent deceives the publisher in his client's behalf, he has not only wronged the publisher, but in the long run it will appear that he has wronged his client too. On the other hand, if he “plays fair,” and scrupulously tells the truth about his wares, and has sufficient intelligence to know approximately what the truth is, every publisher with whom he deals is certain to recognise the fact sooner or later and to look upon such an agent's opinion and goodwill as well worth having. (West III, 1968)

Empowered by literary agents, authors started creating a mess in the traditional business model of publishers as they “demanded larger advances, higher royalty rates, and more advertising than had been customary in earlier decades” (West III, 1968). Aggressive bidding process initiated by agents introduced new perspectives in the publishing industry because “advances went higher, and publishers were obliged to tie up capital in unfinished manuscripts. Subsidiary rights became more important, and publishers were sometimes required to depend on percentages of these rights for their profits on a given title” (West III, 1968). These business practices were completely in contrast to the traditional practices that were followed by established publishers. Emboldened authors and new business models of literary agents clearly annoyed traditional established publishers, for it diluted their autonomy and challenged their way of doing business. Owing to these reasons, publishers of this time would resent literary agents. Publisher Heinemann termed this period “the age of the middleman” (Hepburn, 1968) and Watt was subjected to fierce indirect criticism by him when he imploded: “he is generally a parasite. He always flourishes. I have been forced to give him some little attention lately in my particular business. In it he calls himself a literary agent” (Thompson, 2012). Henry Holt, in his article *The Commercialization of Literature* in 1905, let out his irritation with the new approach of publishing undermining the established methods, and he made it clear that literary agents were the reason for much of his annoyance. Although he admits that agents can be beneficial for new authors, as they can find suitable publishers and they can play an intermediary role between publishers, he still feels they are creating chaos in the publishing industry. James L. W. West III succinctly put Holt's argument:

Holt admits that the agent can sometimes have a legitimate function, even a “beneficent” one, especially when he can find a publisher for a beginning author or help an experienced writer dissolve an unhappy publishing relationship. Holt also recognizes that agents are sometimes useful intermediaries in dealings between

British and American publishers and that they are often helpful in disposing of serial rights. But when agents go beyond these tasks, when they “break down the old relation between authors and publishers” and “make the connection mainly a question of which publisher would bid highest,” they damage the entire industry. The publisher in such situations becomes “a *corpus vilum* to be exploited for money” and “a ‘golden goose’ to be killed for immediate profit.” Holt is quite explicit: “I unhesitatingly say that in carrying his functions farther, the agent has been the parent of most serious abuses, has become a very serious detriment to literature and a leech on the author, sucking blood entirely out of proportion to his later services; and has already begun to defeat himself.” (West III, 1968)

Paul Revere Reynolds does not endorse Holt’s sentiment and differs when he says that publishers should help the new authors, but should let them deal with it thereafter. Holt’s argument tries to revert to the old custom in which Publishers had the upper hand and authority to finalize the publication and economic deal. But Reynold objects on the ground that it leaves authors vulnerable, and this practice might leave authors being exploited and thrown out when their books do not do well. Therefore, a fierce rivalry ensues between publishers and literary agents. Reynolds argues:

The assumption that publishers will always take all of an author’s output is a mistaken one: they won’t. Almost any author’s work is uneven. When he puts out a less successful book the publisher leaves him. He probably says to the author “This book will hurt your reputation.” The author says to the agent, “I must live.” The agent, knowing that he will have the author’s future work and having faith that some of it will be good, sticks to him. (West III, 1968)

In spite of being subjected to utter contempt by publishers, literary agents forged their way into the publishing industry, and they are well-liked by authors. They have been instrumental in unearthing literary talents and making the economic fortune of writers. Thompson argues:

By acquiring a specialist knowledge of the different publishing houses, newspapers and periodicals that were interested in acquiring written material and willing to pay for it, agents were able to provide a range of services to authors - including placing material with suitable publishers and periodicals, negotiating terms and contracts and collecting payments and royalties - that were valued by many authors, including some of the leading writers of the time. (Thompson, 2012)

Role of Literary Agents and Marketing of Literature in India

Literary agents are a new phenomenon in the Indian publishing industry, and they are an absolute necessity and integral part of the flourishing of Indian commercial fiction. Literary agents guide commercial authors, promote their books, and strategize marketing techniques for the promotion of authors and their works. They play a vital role in the publicity and popularity of authors and their commercial success.

Promotional activities of authors and marketing of their artistic output necessitated the “professionalization of the author” (Ramdarshan Bold, 2012). Literary agents played a significant role in turning authors into celebrities, “solving intricate copyright issues” and “boosting a publisher’s list of authors” (Cossu-Beaumont, 2023). In collaboration with publishers, literary

agents maximize the economic potential of the author in overseas locations through translation of books and business strategies. Translations of French and American authors have been published in different countries through popular publishers (Cottenet, 2017), Swedish crime fictions have been popularised around the world through translation thanks to the efforts of Swedish literary agents (Berglund, 2014), and literature produced by some Romanian authors travelled to the overseas audience (Culea, 2013). International readers got the taste of Swedish and Romanian literary excellence primarily through the engagement of literary agents who wanted to inflate the symbolic value of their client authors and maximize profit.

The profession of literary agent has grown leaps and bounds in 21st-century India for various factors. One of the primary reasons is the expansion and growth of the commercialization of the book industry. The celebritization of authors has made the profession of authorship attractive and lucrative. Having been influenced by this factor, a greater number of authors are sending their manuscripts to publishing houses, and many of them are unrecognized first-time authors. It increases the workload of editors to proofread and curate a pile of manuscripts that keep pouring in every passing day. This “overabundance of literary production necessitates another level of curation and gatekeeping to make editorial selection manageable for the publishing industry” (Noorda, 2025). Curation of manuscripts is an “act of selection and arrangement (but also refining, reducing, displaying, simplifying, presenting, and exploring) to add value” (Bhaskar, 2016). Publishers and editors trust literary agents as they carefully filter and select their clients’ manuscripts before approaching the editors. They have professional expertise, experience, and a thorough understanding of the publishing domain, and they apply their knowledge and wisdom in curating and selecting manuscripts from their client authors. Literary agents are “directly related to the success or failure of that curation. [Their] careers [are] defined by what may be understood as micro or individual curatorial paradigms; in essence the agent is a maximally concentrated version of a publisher’s curatorial paradigm. Agents ... function as a vital part of solving publishing’s abundance problem” (Phillips and Bhaskar, 2019).

“Although books are of major cultural and educational significance, they are, almost without exception, produced in an entirely commercial context” (Feather, 1993). Feather’s argument points out a precarious situation the book industry finds itself in the current scenario, when it must not only pursue artistic excellence through cultural production but also ensure a healthy commercial prospect in order to sustain and flourish. Literary agents understand this vulnerable crisis of the book industry, and they maintain a fine balance “to include both more commercial titles and debut/literary authors to manage cash flow and to have big books that can pay for the small ones (Thompson, 2012; Noorda, 2025). Culea put it in a nutshell, “The literary agent is the link between the art of writing and the business of selling and making a profit. He knows best how to improve, promote, and sell a writer’s book” (Culea, 2013).

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Creating Value, Empowering Individuals: *Soka Gakkai* in the Light of Engaged Buddhism

Kirtika Das

Research Scholar

Department: Philosophy

University of North Bengal

West Bengal, India.

Email: kirtikadas97@gmail.com

Abstract:

This paper explores how humanistic values lead to individual empowerment. Engaged Buddhism, a vehicle of Buddhism, defines how traditional Buddhist teachings confront contemporary issues. Considering Engaged Buddhism, various socio-political, economic, and environmental movements have undertaken to address corruption in our lives. Here, we will make a brief tour of *Soka Gakkai*. How does it stand for Engaged Buddhism? The contemporary Japanese social outlook is reflected in the Peace Constitution. The term *Soka Gakkai* demonstrates the functions of a society. We already said Buddhism supports secularism. *Soka Gakkai* ensures secularism and rejects communalism. *Soka Gakkai* focuses on implementing value for every individual and considers a person part of a single community. This philosophical movement aims to transform the culture of violence into a culture of tranquillity with positive initiatives.



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Introduction

At the outset, I want to be succinct in introducing *Soka Gakkai*. *Soka Gakkai* is a lay Buddhist global community founded in Japan. It is an epitome of Engaged Buddhism. Why did this organization gain international recognition, and how does this community confront social crisis? All these will be discussed after the introductory part. In the 21st century, people can easily access everything with the help of science and technology. The globalization culture makes people socio-economically advanced, but what is at stake? In this contemporary period, people's materialistic nature thwarts their spiritual nature. The materialistic nature causes the proliferation of social and environmental crises. Here, a question comes- how can we confront these worldly crises? In this regard, we must understand the causes of violence, war, terrorism, ecological destruction, global warming, and other issues. People shape their values and behaviour through factors such as religion and morality. In a particular region, people have different values, customs, and cultures within their respective communities, and we should be generous towards each other's communities if anything else triggers worldly turbulence. We can observe a profound transformation in ideology, culture, and society during this period. We live a fast-paced life, but one can ask oneself, 'Am I really happy?' Is material happiness absolute? Drastic situations, such as social conflicts, mainly arise from our inner impurities. Most people emphasise personal happiness and remain ignorant of others' well-being. Buddhism is a religion that focuses on the eradication of suffering. Buddhism teaches us that real happiness comes from within, not from material possessions. We mainly suffer due to the inner defilements and ignorance about the true nature of the self and the world. The essence of Buddhism provides a framework for ethical living that nurtures personal well-being and social harmony. Before beginning to discuss *Soka Gakkai's* aim and activities within the arena of Engaged Buddhism, it is important to pause on Engaged Buddhism.

Engaged Buddhism and its features:

During the Vietnam War in 1954, Thich Nhat Hanh, a Vietnamese veteran monk, first coined the term 'Engaged Buddhism'. We have heard about different traditional schools of Buddhism, but what is Engaged Buddhism? Buddhism is a religion that primarily focuses on alleviating suffering. In this sense, it is already engaged. Then, in what sense did Hanh use this term? Hanh perceived that in contemporary times, people are ill due to a lack of communication, craving, hate, wrong perceptions, a hectic life, and the fear of death. These psychological conditions lead to war, terrorism, suicide, destruction of the ecosystem, etc. Such social conditions affect human life, collective welfare, and community relations. Some people, individually and collectively, started a movement to address contemporary issues like violation of human rights, violation of Women's rights, unemployment, war, partial treatment in case of healthcare, environmental despoliation, etc. Some ordained monks and some lay Buddhists are advocates of this movement. They responded to these global issues by applying traditional Buddhist teachings, primarily ethical disciplines. They believed Buddhism is not just meant for personal practice but provides a framework for social and political engagement.

It is fathomable that Buddhist ontological teachings act as a foundation for spiritual and social activism. To be an Engaged Buddhist, one has to be spiritually advanced with three factors:

- The path of mindfulness has the most felicity during the contemporary period. All Engaged Buddhists practice mindfulness meditation to respond to contemporary crises with patience and generosity. Mindfulness helps us deal with suffering rather than escape from it. We predominantly suffer due to unawareness of reality and our actions. Social transformation is possible with mindful living. Mindful living means being aware of the present moment and the circumstances.
- The second characteristic of Engaged Buddhism is interconnectedness. The mindfulness training helps us be aware of our dependence on other conditions of our existence. We are all interconnected- this understanding persuades some responsible Buddhists to respond non-violently to worldly sufferings. If any living being suffers, the senses of compassion and empathy invigorate some Buddhists to become social, environmental, or political activists. Engaged Buddhism is all about communal living with peace and harmony. Communal means to consider the whole world as a *Sangha*.
- The third characteristic of Engaged Buddhism is both world-affirming and spiritually transcendent. Engaged Buddhists, unlike traditional Buddhists, come forward to help others, not for gaining merit for oneself, but rather, they help others as they feel their pain. Practical activism is their motto: reconstructing a peaceful society rather than liberating from this *samsara*.

Buddhist Understanding of Value Orientation:

Buddhism wants to make people aware of human values. The value crisis has caused social change, a materialist outlook, and social disintegration in the contemporary period. Many thinkers perceive traditional values as perilous; hence, we are experiencing such drastic social problems. Buddhist teachings are pragmatic rather than focusing solely on religious practices such as rituals, observances, and worship. A responsible person must know the boundary between traditional values and materialistic values. Life is all about value orientation; each person's experiences vary according to how they implement their values. Considering the theory of *Madhyamapratipada* in the contemporary context, our lifestyle should be moderate, neither influenced by materialistic values nor engaged in the social sphere. Buddha, in his discourses, never emphasised the idea of liberation from this *samsara*. He reiterated the liberation from negative thoughts and embraced spiritual values. It means one's evil thoughts lead to evil actions, which cause suffering in one's life as karmic consequences. Material needs must be served as necessary for greater development, i.e., spiritual advancement. Buddhism emphasised that our personal value system will undergird spiritual values beyond materialism. Everything possesses a good and an evil nature, and material needs qualify as good nature, but materialistic values affect one's overall health and collective well-being. In this regard, we can remind you of a saying of Buddha:

*Tinadosanikhattaniicchadosaayajpaja
tasma hi vigaticchesudinnajhotimahapphalaj.
Dhammapada. (Verse 359)*

It means that desires or greed are among the causes of negative thoughts. Negative thoughts ruin our overall well-being, so we must know our needs and spiritual values.

SokaGakkai as Engaged Buddhism:

Japan is well-known for its vast majority of Buddhist followers. Though this country also has so many social challenges, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, a Japanese educator, founded a non-governmental organisation and a lay Buddhist movement named 'Soka Gakkai' in 1930. This organisation gained international recognition due to its Engaged Buddhism standard. The term "Soka" is a Japanese word that means "Value Creation", and the term "Gakkai" stands for "Society". The three aspects of SokaGakkai are mindful living, faith in Nichiren Buddhism, and social activism. Here, a question arises: In what sense is SokaGakkai identified as an engaged Buddhist movement? In this regard, Christopher S. Queen upheld three criteria for identifying examples of Engaged Buddhism-

1. The leaders are reformers with a recognised Buddhist identity.
2. The doctrine is a modern reinterpretation of ancient Buddhism.
3. The institution as a manifestation of Buddhist symbols in the public sphere."

Now, let us interpret whether this movement fulfils the above criteria. Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, founder and first president of Soka Gakkai, was a lay Buddhist. Josei Toda and Daisaku Ikeda, his successors and presidents, were also lay Buddhists, and the present president, Minoru Harada, is also a lay Buddhist leader of this ongoing religious movement. Nichiren Buddhism, another sect of Buddhism, is the foundation of Soka Gakkai. Nichiren Buddhism promotes faith in the Lotus Sutra, chanting the Daimoku, or title of the Lotus Sutra, "*Nam-myoho-renge-kyo*", and practising harmless activities can improve one's nature. These three ideals can help us attain Buddhahood in this life. While relating the third criterion of Engaged Buddhism, we can find Soka Gakkai in its flag, which uses a tricolour of blue, yellow, and red, and in between, there is a *dharmacakra*. This tricolour blue, yellow, and red represents peace, glory, and victory respectively, and seeks happiness and peace for every person. This lay Buddhist community emphasises the idea of value creation. Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, this community's first president, focused on a humanistic outlook. He recognised that everything must be valorised to bring forth its original nature. Suppose we value everything in our lives, even trouble; we gradually learn how to respond to it. Through faith and practice, one can realise one's/inherent dignity to imply inner strength for creating a better society.

Importance of Chanting in the Soka Gakkai Movement:

Chanting is special in every religion according to different cultures, traditions, and regions. Chanting is common in Buddhism, both in monastic and lay communities. But the foremost question is, in what context is chanting performed? Chanting is mainly performed during ceremonies and devotional practice in temples and homes. Monastics practice chanting as a part of their daily activities to advance spiritually. Here, a question may arise: how does the practice of chanting promote social activism? As *Soka Gakkai* is a social activist movement centred on its social welfare activities and on chanting the mantra *Namu Myoho Renge Kyo* to transform the human spirit, *Soka Gakkai* rooted its activities in the Socially Engaged Buddhist global order while following the Nichiren tradition of devotion to the Lotus Sutra. A cogent response to the above question about the social dimension of chanting the Daimoku of the Lotus Sutra is that the power of chanting fosters a sense of harmony with neighbours and nations. The followers of *Soka Gakkai* are asked to practice chanting daily as it causes personal transformation through

courage, compassion, and wisdom. Chanting is regarded as the way to cleanse inner impurities of anger, greed, and delusion to actualise Buddhahood. When the followers of *Soka Gakkai* chant the sutra, it gives them a sense of collective energy, supports one another's spiritual growth, and shares their struggles. Chanting is done to recharge one's positive energy and face problems with full responsibility for one's actions. It means that chanting is one of the paths of human revolution, i.e., fundamentally changing the sense of self-centeredness into a sense of living for others. In this respect, we can remind you of a saying of the Buddha from the *Dhammapada*:

*Na tam mata pita kayiraanneva pi canataka
Sammapanibhitamcittamseyyasonamtatokare.* (Verse 43)

This expression states that a well-directed mind always engages in welfare activities. Buddhism believes that spiritual transformation precedes social transformation. The practice of chanting is a method to change one's life and social conditions. Chanting gives us the courage to create positive values in our lives and communities.

The Concept of Ten Worlds in *Soka Gakkai*:

Soka Gakkai is critical to Nichiren Buddhism, and the members of this community are influenced by the concept of Ten Worlds. *Soka Gakkai* engages in social and political activities, believing that it can transform society into a Buddhist realm. Buddhism believes that social chaos is the manifestation of inner impurities. Specifying this thought, we can adduce the first verse of the *Dhammapada*:

*Manopubbangammadhamma
Manosetthamanomaya
Manasacepadutthena
Bhasativakarotiva
Tatonamdukkhamanveti
Cakkamvavahatopadam.* (Verse 01)

This verse clearly expresses that our mind is the forerunner of all phenomena. If we purify our thoughts with wisdom and compassion, our actions will always lead to beneficence.

The Ten Worlds are not ten different realms; instead, these are ten states or conditions one can experience. Our life is a series of moments and experiences, and the ten states of the mind are responsible for beneficial and harmful actions. The ten worlds range from lower states of life, or the Six Paths, to higher states of life, or the Four Noble Worlds. The Six Paths are Hell, Hunger, Animality, Asuras, Humanity, and Heaven. Voice-Hearers, Cause-Awakened Ones, *Bodhisattvas*, and *Buddhahood* are the Four Noble Worlds. Each state is inherent in every individual, and one can be in any of these realms through their thoughts and actions. Here, a question comes up: Are any of these states permanent? A cogent response would be "all these 'worlds' coexist in the minds of humans, but when one world manifests itself more strongly, the other nine worlds are generally latent." So *Soka Gakkai*'s goal is to promote social transformation through the idea of the human spirit. The key aspect of the concept of Ten Worlds is Mutual Possession. It means existing in hell, which contains the potentiality for the other nine states. The state of Buddhahood can be attained even while remaining in the most negative circumstances. The leaders of *Soka Gakkai* sponsored a series of cultural meetings and

meditation retreats to encourage their followers to reflect on a new way of thinking to save ourselves from our evil thoughts. They believe no external force causes harm to oneself and the world. We should advance ourselves to support the development and culture of each other's societies while recognising differences.

***Soka Gakkai* and Buddhist Humanism:**

Soka Gakkai does not believe in rebirth in the sense of taking birth in Buddha's 'Pure Land'. This earth can be a land of purity, peace, education, and compassion. This movement focuses on transforming the culture of inner impurities like greed, delusion, and violence into a culture of dignity, freedom, and peace. A relationship between *Soka Gakkai* and Buddhist Humanism is that both philosophical movements promote human welfarism. *Soka Gakkai* enriches its intervention by imparting socio-ethical education, valuing each individual, and cultivating peace. Buddhist Humanism focuses on humans' worth and their capacity for positive change. We live in a human-centred world. If we think we have the potential to save ourselves from our immoral actions, then we can do it. The members of *Soka Gakkai* base their activism on a humanistic approach, i.e., this humanistic outlook must be present in every aspect of life, including education, economic development, and politics. Women's empowerment, gender equality, and the promotion of human rights and environmental development are central to *Soka Gakkai*'s work. Here, a reflection can be put on light- does a humanistic approach promote ecological values? An environment is a complex of humans, animals, and plants, and humans, with their rationality and spirituality, must empower themselves to care for the planet. Humanism prompts individuals to be aware of addressing environmental issues, and the social, cultural, and moral values must be the foundation for environmental values. As human beings have the potential to create and destroy, one must intervene in the creative nature in a proactive way to combat environmental issues. Buddhist Humanism emphasizes human dignity and individual responsibility for social transformation.

Human Revolution: A Way to Human Security

Daisaku Ikeda reified the idea of social transformation through the lens of self-improvement with the idea of Human Revolution. Human Revolution means people can revolt against negative traits like anger, fear, and selfishness and motivate themselves to achieve inner transformation. Inner transformation is a process of bringing forth one's positive traits through actions. The human revolution calls for a radical transformation of the present condition, in which we break free from the shackles of the "lesser self" and express our "greater self". We know about many kinds of revolutions, such as political, scientific, social, and industrial. However, no other revolutions bring much better for the society as long as people are free from their evilness. So, the human revolution is the foundation for any other revolution, because each worldly crisis arises from inner defilements. Positive thinking can make a better society. Every religion directs us on how to live a harmonious life, but everything starts with our way of thinking. Every individual has the potential to bring forth their inner good through behaviour and actions, before what is prioritised is our willpower and belief to be in a pure, positive, and enlightened condition of life. The state of Buddhahood is not something enigmatic. In simple terms, Buddhahood is possible when we shift our thinking from personal concerns to thinking

and doing for others. This attitude of thinking strengthens and accelerates the state of Buddhahood. Everything needs a definite path to actualise the highest potential of life. Here, a question arises: What are the ways to express Buddha's nature by itself? According to Nichiren Buddhism, we cannot change a society within a few days; it is hard to do so. We can take responsibility to change the nature of our negative past causes right from this moment. Every change starts with awareness about mental and social conditions. We must develop a robust vitality that helps us tackle our problems with a sense of inner liberation. In this regard, Daisaku Ikeda stated, "A great human revolution in just a single individual will help achieve a change in the destiny of a nation and, further, will enable a change in the destiny of all humankind."

Here, a question may arise in our minds: Does human revolution guarantee human security? Human revolution encompasses personal transformation and social transformation. Social transformation is possible by revising the social, political, and economic infrastructure. Human security means that the government must fulfil the basic needs of every individual. The government must reform the social institutions to improve education, cease violence, and protect the environment. Human security promotes people's safety in an environment, mainly in their working place, to get care for their health and be protected from violence. Thus, human revolution leads to a radical transformation of one's mind and the society where human security is always prioritised.

Implementation of "Values" for a Moderate Lifestyle:

Makiguchi believed that chanting, study, and practice are ways to enrich one's personality, eradicate the suffering of others, and frame respect and equality as essential conditions for humankind. Before all these, we should create positive value for individuals and society to face daily challenges. Makiguchi countered the Western concept of human values, i.e., "truth", "beauty", and "good", with "beauty", "gain", and "good". Why did he substitute gain in place of truth? Makiguchi perceived that people are generally self-centred; they improve and create new things to meet their demands. But humanity urges a balanced life between personal and social happiness. We can attain true happiness in this life when we value "beauty" and "gain" for an individual's life and practice "good" as a social value. *Soka Gakkai* promulgated their notion in every part of this world with the thought that Buddhahood is already within us in a deep sleep and needs to be awakened to lead a balanced life. A value-creation society mainly promotes education as the psychological need to enter a spiritual realm. We need to be revolt means human revolution in contemporary days, emphasizing human security as a key to achieving true happiness. Implementing values in the right way surely reflects transformation, from an individual to a whole community. The value "good" supports welfare activities. This value makes the other two values "beauty" and "gain", possible. A question always comes up: why do humans revolt against social challenges? The human revolution in *Soka Gakkai* qualifies one's humanity to root out violence and injustice through peace cultivation. A rich life is always directed to a transformation of one into many. Spiritual enhancement is based on both the rights of psychological needs, i.e., education, and physiological needs, i.e., food, healthcare, and shelter. If social infrastructure fails to meet basic needs, it needs to be reformed. When everything becomes a culture, then why not the human spirit become a culture?

Soka Gakkai and Buddhist Democracy:

Soka Gakkai stands against both economic systems- socialism and capitalism. They upheld a concept of 'Buddhist Democracy'. How is it conducive for humankind? Buddhist democracy is interchangeable with Humanistic Socialism. In both cases of Capitalism and Socialism, a single unit will benefit and promote its authority. However, Buddhist democracy stands for the means that welfare actions have the only aim to prioritise social harmony. Buddhist democracy derives from the Buddhist doctrines of *Madhyamapratipada* and *Pratityasamutpada*. *Madhyamapratipada* stands for a balanced life. In this sense, Buddhist democracy solves the practical imbalances between socialism and capitalism. *Pratityasamutpada* reminds us of our socialistic nature, which impacts our karmic consequences. Among these three values, "beauty" and "gain" justify capitalism, and "good" justifies socialism. In this period, people always competed between winners and losers. This system is a condition of capitalism, and its bitter competition divides society into two groups. This kind of government provides essential facilities to a specific group of people, empowering some deprived people to achieve true freedom and equality. Daisaku Ikeda insisted that Buddhist democracy is possible when a government leader has moral responsibility and a compassionate outlook toward all living beings, with minimal conditions such as quality healthcare, a sustainable environment, liberal education, and equal treatment. If these conditions are fulfilled, unfair economic practices and social discrimination can be overcome.

Education and Self-empowerment:

The *Soka Gakkai* adopted some charters in 1995, updated in 2021, which give education prime importance. A peaceful, multinational world is not utopia; it is possible with an enlightened citizenry. Education plays a vital role in transforming a limited, parochial worldview into a sense of seeing beyond the self and understanding the unity of humanity. Education is not just a way to get well jobs and fulfil our desires, but it is the way to overcome inner defilements and be in a world of peace and tranquillity with others. Social consciousness emerges from an educated mind, and it can kill the twin evils of hatred and greed that stem from an ignorant mind. Humanistic education is one of the most important subjects imparted in *Soka Gakkai* educational institutions. They hired teachers who met these criteria: they should be sensitive and caring. Desire and curiosity can enhance an enthusiastic mind's ability to discover strengths and weaknesses. The *Soka Gakkai* leaders understood that formal education alone cannot revive a mind with social responsibility; humanistic education is the key to intertwining self-empowerment and social well-being. Why does self-empowerment prioritize in this movement? *Soka Gakkai* members realised that self-empowerment advances the path to a better understanding of the world.

Self-empowerment does not mean domination; rather, it enhances our spirituality and enables us to engage in welfare activities. Education makes the invisible things visible; likewise, self-empowerment transforms powerlessness. Self-empowerment is the bedrock to understanding that one is fully responsible for one's destiny. A person with deep faith, good education, a benign nature, and hard work can be a master of one's life and has the consciousness of social responsibility. *Soka Gakkai* reiterates the importance of educational intervention in supervising values on the path of empowerment. A formal education cannot

inspire a mind to empower oneself with its ability. Humanistic education is the way to actualise our capability and power to contribute to a greater purpose, and every purpose with value can signify a transformation of an environment. If asked why we need education, a general answer is to live a dignified life, but a sound answer is to realise the truth: real happiness, which is achieved through education. A global citizen is always focused on humanistic values rather than materialistic values.

Does *Soka Gakkai* support Absolute Pacifism or Conditional Pacifism?

Absolute Pacifism is the ideology where war and violence are wrong in principle, and violence must be avoided in every situation; whereas, Conditional Pacifism supports violence if it is justified in certain circumstances. It means that violence is not wrong in a specific problem. Both of these stands fall under the category of moral prohibition. Here, the question is what standpoint does this religious group follow? Like every country, Japan is a victim of a social crisis. The leaders of *Soka Gakkai* have also been politically active with their renowned party, Komeito. In particular circumstances, their position sounded like a Conditional Pacifist. In general, this socially engaged Buddhist community promotes the message of absolute pacifism with multi-nationalism. Robert Kisala, a leading scholar of Japan, believes that maintaining absolute pacifism is possible only for those who want to be within the outer limits of society. Other than this, when a movement seeks to shift in a more realistic way towards the centre to influence mainstream society, a conditional stance is expected for the sake of national defence and social order. Again, let us consider another reflection from a Buddhist scholar, Richard Hughes Seager, who notes that *Soka Gakkai* bases its movement on three resolutions: absolute pacifism, the sanctity of human life, and human dignity. Many thinkers criticised this organisation for their centric nature and community-based activities, but this allegation remains unsolved. Daisaku Ikeda practised many peace-related activities, but his position in a definite way can be considered multi-nationalism rather than pacifism. Being a Buddhist as well as a political activist, he wanted to cease the root cause of the trouble. According to him, a social activist and spiritualist must learn to act with "soft diplomacy"ⁱⁱⁱ rather than completely deny pacifism. Engaged Buddhism embraces the culture of maintaining modesty with majesty to reduce the threat of war between nations. World peace can be accomplished with the foundation of personal transformation. When the people of nation-states become "global citizens," this leads to a transition from nation to multinationalism.

Conclusion:

As per our concern, we are so conditioned that our social consciousness goes on a holiday. *Soka Gakkai* and some other Engaged Buddhist communities felt the need to uplift our spirituality to cease social turbulence. We are responsible for these catastrophes and have the potential to cease this world fire. Everything starts with values, i.e., oneself, friends, communities, and nations. Considering that each life is valuable and purity lies in this world, we can transform one's selfish nature into a compassionate one. The self-empowerment concept not only specifies material satisfaction, but also allows one to have a clear picture of one's position and self-confidence to overcome all adversities. Indeed, humankind is responsible for today's deplorable conditions. *Soka Gakkai*, with its idea of self-empowerment, reiterates that we can create this world into a

joyful world. Unlike the interpretation of Pure Land Buddhism, Engaged Buddhism proceeds to turn the horrendous conditions of the world into a world of true peace, harmony, and generosity. *Soka Gakkai International members* in Australia, Southeast Asia, and Canada advance their actions based on the ontological dimension of Buddhism, i.e., Karma and responsibility. *Soka Gakkai* believes that Karma has cumulative effects from all actions, good or bad. One's spiritual upliftment is the foundation for one's actions and well-being. This movement explains how chanting and faith can lead to Buddhahood in this realm. Human Revolution shapes the path for better actions for the nation, and education and self-empowerment are pillars for accepting each other's culture and differences. With these diversities, we learn to improve life for all of humanity. It is our responsibility to kill our evil nature so that our inherent potentiality for Buddhahood can be manifested. As a concluding remark, I would like to adduce a portion from the Lotus Sutra:

“The rain falls everywhere,
coming down on all four sides.
Its flow and saturation are measureless,
reaching to every area of the earth,
to the ravines and valleys of the mountains and streams,
to the remote and secluded places where grow
plants, bushes, medicinal herbs,
trees large and small,
a hundred grains, rice seedlings,
sugar cane, grape vines.
The rain moistens them all;
None fails to receive its full share.”

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Development and Validation of an Aptitude

Test in Science for Secondary Students

Kingshuk Karan, PhD

Assistant Professor

Department of Education

Mugberia Gangadhar Mahavidyalaya,

Purba Medinipur, West Bengal, India.

Email: kingshukkaran@gmail.com

Sujit Pal, PhD

Principal

Institute of Education for Women

Hastings House, Kolkata

West Bengal, India

Email: spalaug552@gmail.com

Abstract

The study aims to develop and validate a science aptitude test for ninth-grade students. A multiple-choice test with 30 items was finalized after the pilot study. The test was administered to 130 secondary-level students, including 60 boys and 70 girls, who were randomly selected. Proper methodology and statistical techniques were used to validate the test. 'Item analysis' was done for the selection of suitable items in the desired test. 'Reliability' was calculated through the 'Kuder-Richardson Formula 20 (KR-20)' and the split-half method, yielding coefficients of 0.88 and 0.86, respectively. Content validity was assessed by expert rating and analysed using the content validity index. Intrinsic validity was also measured by using Pearson correlation techniques. Mean, Standard deviation, and Stanine norms are also set up. The study adopts an analytical approach to assess students' aptitude levels with high accuracy. A reliability coefficient of 0.88, achieved through a robust methodology, underscores the study's credibility. Furthermore, this study will help teachers, curriculum planners, and students develop a stronger aptitude for science at the secondary stage.



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Introduction

Science is a systematic knowledge gathered through observations and experimentation of facts in the physical and natural world. According to Charles Derwin (1887), "...Science consists in grouping facts so that general laws or conclusions may be drawn from them". Psychologists state that every individual is distinctive in nature. Every student has different inner potentiality. Education is the process of developing inner potential and adjusting to an ever-changing society. The educational process brings about behavioural change in a student, enabling him to succeed in life. At the secondary education stage, which begins in adolescence, students are naturally curious and creative. They always try to understand the reasons behind different natural facts. To guide students in this age group, efforts should be made to orient them towards the science stream and develop their aptitude for science. A student with proper scientific aptitude helps in deciding on a career (Rao, 2003, p. 8). Aptitude is an inner capability of a learner to achieve a number of precise knowledge, perform any mechanical work, or to become a musician, etc. Freeman (1962, p. 431) noted that aptitude tests can be used to determine an individual's potential to perform a specific activity within a limited range. The Scientific Aptitude test is used to measure a student's special ability in science to predict future career and achievements. It encourages learning through problem solving, reasoning, and higher-order thinking skills. Rao (2003, p. 8) stated that, to increase scientific aptitude, factors such as physical, social, and emotional development, as well as interests and abilities, would be considered. The current study aims to develop a science aptitude test to assess the aptitude levels of secondary school students. Thus, it helps the teacher inculcate students' aptitude for science and select an appropriate educational course. It also serves to motivate learners, classify learners, and provide proper educational and career counselling.

Review of the Literature

A systematic review of the literature is a key step in conducting any research. It helps identify appropriate gaps in the previous study and provides a framework for conducting each step of the research. The investigator intends to review the relevant literature thoroughly. Dave (1964) developed and standardized a scientific aptitude test to support in-depth analysis. The tool consisted of five dimensions: science information, scientific comprehension, mechanical comprehension, numerical ability, and spatial relations. It was applied to students at the secondary level. Ghosh (1986) measured scientific aptitude for class VIII students in West Bengal. He developed a scientific aptitude test with six dimensions: in-depth scientific facts, scientific comprehension, scientific reasoning, cause-and-effect relationships, critical thinking, and the application of scientific knowledge. The study was conducted on 620 students. Item analysis, reliability, and validity were measured for standardization. Similar works by Chandra (2007) prepared scientific aptitude among class IX students. A stratified random technique was applied to draw samples. The aptitude test consisted of 48 items across 10 sub-scales: scientific interest, ability to reason, interpretation ability, experimental bent, logical reasoning, capability to see relationships, verbal comprehension and interpretation, logical conclusion, data interpretation, and accuracy of observation. Reliability of the test was 0.74. The same line of work was carried out in Nagaland by Zeliang (2007), who developed an aptitude test and standardized it for secondary-level students. The tool consists of four sub-scales: scientific

knowledge and information, scientific reasoning and application, mechanical comprehension, and numerical ability. Stratified random sampling was used to draw 1340 responses from different strata, like rural, urban, govt., and private schools. Reliability was measured using the KR-21 method, with a value of 0.68. Another study carried out by Ahmed (2007), on the impact of aptitude and attitude in science on achievement at the secondary level in Bangalore city. A multiple-choice type 50-item scientific aptitude scale was constructed and validated. Reliability of the aptitude scale was 0.8421. The significant findings were that girls had significantly superior scientific aptitude than boys. Students from the government and private schools had the same level of aptitude. Mukhopadhyay (2011) conducted a study on Aptitude in Physics at the higher secondary level. He constructed a physics aptitude test. Stratified sampling was used to collect the sample. A total of 703 learners were selected as the sample for test standardization. The test encompasses various dimensions, including “scientific information, physics vocabulary, number series, spatial ability, formulation, verbal comprehension and interpretation, and non-verbal (mechanical interpretation) skills”. The test demonstrated high reliability, with a KR-20 coefficient of 0.88. Hashmi et al. (2012) prepared and endorsed a mathematics aptitude test for secondary learners. The tool's reliability coefficient was 0.82. Kumari and Gupta (2013) prepared an aptitude test battery in science at Meghalaya. The test battery had 210 items in four sections: reasoning, numerical ability, scientific information, and science vocabulary. Reliability was very high (0.94) using the test-retest method. Joshi and Patel (2016) developed and standardized a ‘science aptitude test’ for learners aged 12-14 in the state of Gujarat. The ‘reliability’ coefficient of the test, determined using the test-retest method, was 0.674. A significant finding was that boys and girls had the same aptitude level. Rural students had comparatively lower aptitude in science than urban students.

Recently, Pandia, Sridhar, and Kumar (2016) developed a scientific aptitude test for secondary students. The test comprised 30 items distributed across five dimensions: reasoning in science, analogy, comprehension, mathematical ability, and logical reasoning. The test's reliability coefficient was 0.874 by the Spearman-Brown method. Another significant work, conducted abroad by Osadebe and Nwabeze (2018), developed and validated aptitude tests in physics for the higher secondary level. Item analysis and reliability were measured for the Physics aptitude test. The difficulty level of the items ranged from 0.3 to 0.7, and the discriminating index ranged from 0.3 to 0.44. The reliability coefficient was very high at 0.94. Brahmabhatt and Shah (2019) made an aptitude test and validated it in Gujarat state. The test consisted of five dimensions, i.e., reasoning in science, numerical ability, analogy, and logical reasoning. Results showed that boys and girls had the same aptitude. Rural students had superior aptitude to urban students. A similar study by Patel on scientific aptitude at the secondary level was conducted in 2019. The significant findings were that boys and girls had the same level of aptitude. Urban students were superior to rural students, and high achievers were superior to low achievers in spatial ability. Lalrinpuui (2022) measured “Scientific Aptitude of Higher Secondary School Science Students in Aizawl District”. Using stratified random sampling, 325 samples were collected. The tool consisted of eight sub-scales: “experimental bent, ability to reason, ability to draw conclusion, detection of illogical conclusions, ability to interpret, scientific interest, ability to solve general problems, and accuracy of observation”. Intrinsic validity of the test was very high, above 0.9, and the reliability coefficient was 0.85. Significant findings revealed that the majority of learners had an average

aptitude level, and boys and girls did not differ significantly in aptitude. Students in government schools had a comparatively more advanced aptitude than those in private schools.

Need for the study

After an in-depth study of the literature, it was found that there is no such effective tool for measuring science aptitude among secondary learners in the West Bengal Board of Secondary Education (WBBSE) in recent times. Therefore, the researchers decided to develop and validate a science aptitude test for Class IX learners in West Bengal.

Objective

To develop and validate an aptitude test in science for students studying in class IX of WBBSE

Steps for the Development of Aptitude Test in Science (ATS)

I. Selection of Content Areas for the Test

The prime intention of the research was to measure the science aptitude of ninth-grade adolescent students. To achieve this, it was essential to develop and standardize a science aptitude test that covers the physical and biological science content outlined in the WBBSE syllabus.

II. Identification of Dimensions of ATS

The researchers identified eight dimensions from the notable research works in this area in India. These dimensions are i) Scientific Information, ii) Conceptual Understanding, iii) Ability to see Relationship, iv) Ability to see reason, v) Verbal comprehension and Interpretation, vi) Formulation, vii) Accuracy of Observation, viii) Non-verbal (mechanical) Interpretation.

III. Development of Items for Draft ATS

After identifying the various sub-tests or dimensions, items were selected from the Class IX physical and biological science syllabus accordingly. The test was designed using multiple-choice questions, each with four options and one correct answer. Expert reviews were sought to improve the draft by eliminating overly burdensome items and resolving ambiguities. The overall structure of the test was evaluated across key dimensions, and an approximate time limit was established for its completion.

IV. Try-out of the Draft ATS

A try-out is an essential step in constructing an objective test, as it helps determine the difficulty level and discriminatory power of each item. This process allows for the identification and removal of items with low discrimination or ambiguity. The main goal is to ensure the suitability of the test items and finalize the overall test structure.

a. Selection of Samples

For the try-out, a sample of 130 students, comprising both boys and girls from rural and urban areas and from Govt and private schools, was selected using the 'random sampling method'. The participants were newly promoted Class-X students from the 2019–2020 academic session. The sample included 60 boys and 70 girls.

b. Administration of the ATS for try-out

The draft aptitude test, comprising 46 items, was administered to 130 students as a trial. Students were instructed to read the guidelines provided at the top of the test booklet and complete all items. On average, it took about 60 minutes to finish the test. Feedback was collected on

language clarity and comprehension of instructions. Based on student input and observed difficulties, several items were revised to improve clarity and suitability for the last form of the ATS.

c. Evaluation procedure of the answer sheets

After administering the test, the researcher evaluated the response sheets using a pre-prepared answer key. Each correct response was awarded one mark, while incorrect or unattempted items received zero. No partial marks were given for any item.

V. Item analysis

Item analysis is a statistical process used to evaluate how effectively each item contributes to a test's overall quality. This is achieved by calculating the 'difficulty level' and 'discrimination index' for each item, allowing for the selection of the most appropriate items for the final form of this ATS. Kelley's (1939) method was used to compute these values. A higher difficulty value indicates that an item is easier, while a higher discrimination index reflects the item's effectiveness in distinguishing between high and low performers.

VI. Final Selection of the Test Items

The final selection of items for the science aptitude test was based on the item analysis. The items with moderate difficulty levels (difficulty values between 40 and 87) and discrimination indices ranging from 0.2 to 0.8 were retained, in line with the guidelines by Ebel and Frisbie (1991, p. 232), who recommended a minimum discrimination index of 0.19. Sixteen items that did not meet these criteria were removed. The finalized test comprises 8 dimensions and 30 items.

Table 1: *Difficulty Value (DV) and Discrimination Index (DI) of 30 items in the final ATS*

Item	DV	DI	Item	DV	DI
1	66.15	0.54	16	74.61	0.68
2	82.3	0.37	17	60	0.45
3	76.92	0.34	18	77.69	0.54
4	86.92	0.25	19	86.92	0.37
5	81.53	0.54	20	83.07	0.48
6	82.3	0.28	21	75.38	0.57
7	40	0.28	22	49.23	0.71
8	50	0.37	23	74.61	0.51
9	78.46	0.34	24	66.15	0.57
10	60	0.51	25	49.23	0.68
11	70	0.6	26	63.84	0.77
12	80	0.6	27	74.61	0.51
13	63.92	0.77	28	55.38	0.6
14	69.23	0.2	29	40	0.71
15	56.92	0.34	30	77.69	0.37

Table 2: *Dimension-wise test items in the final ATS*

Dimensions	Serial number of the items	Total no of test items
1) Scientific Information (D1)	1,2,3,4	4
2) Conceptual Understanding (D2)	5,6,7,8	4
3) Ability to see Relationship (D3)	9,10,11,12	4

4) Ability to see Reason (D4)	13,14,15	3
5) Verbal comprehension and Interpretation (D5)	16,17,18,19	4
6) Formulation (D6)	20,21,22	3
7) Accuracy of Observation (D7)	23,24,25,26	4
8) Non-verbal (mechanical) Interpretation (D8)	27,28,29,30	4
Total		30

VI. Reliability of the Test

A test is considered reliable if it produces consistent results across repeated administrations. To evaluate the 'reliability' of the aptitude test, both 'internal consistency' and 'split-half' reliability were calculated.

a) Internal Consistency Reliability

An effective method to assess a test's reliability is through its internal consistency. Since the items varied in difficulty and had only one correct answer each, the Kuder-Richardson Formula 20 (KR-20) was used. The resulting reliability coefficient was 0.88, indicating high reliability. According to Fraenkel & Wallen (2009), a KR-20 value of 0.70 or higher is considered acceptable, indicating strong reliability for the science aptitude test.

b) Split-half Reliability

In the split-half method, the scores from the aptitude test were divided into two parts - one consisting of odd-numbered items and the other of even-numbered items. The reliability was then calculated using the Spearman-Brown formula, yielding a coefficient of 0.86. This indicates that the science aptitude test possesses a high level of reliability.

VII. Validity of the Test

'Validity' refers to the degree to which a test effectively measures what it is designed to assess. Establishing validity is essential in the development and validation of any psychological test. In this study, the researcher ensured the validity of the science aptitude test through content validity, face validity, and intrinsic validity.

a) Content Validity

The validity of the ATS was assessed by evaluating how well each item, subtest, and the overall test aligned with the intended content areas. To ensure accuracy, expert judgment was sought. Five teacher educators specializing in physical science, biological science, and education were consulted to carefully review each item, the associated subtests, and the complete test. 'Content Validity Index' (CVI) was applied as the primary measure, following the framework proposed by Lynn (1986) and cited in Polit & Beck (2006). CVI helps to determine whether a test includes a suitable number of items to represent the construct being measured. Two forms of CVI were applied:

- 'Item-Level Content Validity Index (I-CVI)': Signifies the proportion of experts rating an item as relevant (3 or 4 on a 4-point rating scale).
- 'Scale-Level Content Validity Index (S-CVI)': Reflects the validity of the entire scale, calculated through (i) the mean expert proportion, (ii) the combined expert proportion, and (iii) the mean of all I-CVIs.

According to Polit et al. (2007), excellent content validity is indicated by I-CVI values of 0.78 or higher and an S-CVI/Ave of 0.90 or above. In the present study, the Content Validity Index was calculated using the method outlined by Patra & Guha (2018), and the detailed results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Ratings of Items by five specialists: Items rated only two (2) on a 2-Point Relevance Scale (Patra & Guha, 2018)

Test Items	Specialist-1	Specialist-2	Specialist-3	Specialist-4	Specialist-5	Number of unity	I-CVI
1	*	*	*	*	*	5	1
2	*	*	*	*	*	5	1
3	*	*	*	*	√	4	0.8
4	*	*	*	*	*	5	1
5	*	*	*	*	*	5	1
6	*	*	*	*	*	5	1
7	*	*	*	*	√	4	0.8
8	√	*	*	*	*	4	0.8
9	*	*	*	*	*	5	1
10	*	*	*	*	*	5	1
11	*	*	*	*	*	5	1
12	*	*	*	*	*	5	1
13	*	√	*	*	*	4	0.8
14	√	*	*	*	*	4	0.8
15	*	*	√	*	*	4	0.8
16	*	*	*	*	*	5	1
17	*	*	*	*	*	5	1
18	*	*	*	*	*	5	1
19	*	*	*	*	*	5	1
20	*	*	*	√	*	4	0.8
21	√	*	*	*	*	4	0.8
22	*	*	*	*	*	5	1
23	*	*	*	*	*	5	1
24	*	*	*	*	*	5	1
25	*	*	*	√	*	4	0.8
26	*	*	*	*	*	5	1
27	*	*	√	*	*	4	0.8
28	*	*	*	*	*	5	1
29	*	√	*	*	*	4	0.8
30	*	*	*	√	*	4	0.8
Proportion relevant	0.9	0.93	0.93	0.9	0.93	(ii) Combined proportion by 5 experts = 0.92	(iii)Mean I-CVI = 0.92
(i)Average Specialist Proportion	0.92						

Perfectly Suitable (*) = 2, Nearly Suitable (√) = 1, I-CVI = Content Validity Index for Items

The average rating provided by the five specialists (experts), reflected in the ‘Scale-Level Content Validity Index (S-CVI/Ave)’, was 0.92 (as shown in Table 3). This high score strongly supports the test's validity, indicating that the science aptitude test is both comprehensive and relevant to its intended content.

b) Intrinsic Validity

Intrinsic validity refers to the internal consistency and interrelationships among the subtests and between each subtest and the overall test. To assess this, the ‘Pearson product-moment correlation’ was used to calculate item-subtest (dimension), subtest-subtest, and subtest-total test correlations. The correlation matrices are presented in Tables 4 and 5. All ‘correlation coefficients’ were found to be significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed), indicating that the science aptitude test possesses strong intrinsic validity.

Table 4: *Item-Subtest Correlation Coefficients of the ATS (Dimension-wise)*

Dimensions	Item numbers	Coefficient of Correlations(r) with Items respectively
D1	1,2,3,4	0.679, 0.433, 0.750, 0.631
D2	5,6,7,8	0.657, 0.535, 0.672, 0.712
D3	9,10,11,12	0.670, 0.592, 0.752, 0.709
D4	13,14,15	0.704, 0.544, 0.583
D5	16,17,18,19	0.717, 0.562, 0.665, 0.632
D6	20,21,22	0.752, 0.705, 0.776
D7	23,24,25,26	0.705, 0.729, 0.776, 0.748
D8	27,28,29,30	0.705, 0.729, 0.776, 0.748

Table 5: *Subtests (Dimensions) – Total test correlation coefficients of the ATS*

	D1	D2	D3	D4	D5	D6	D7	D8	Total
D1	-	.486**	.450**	.325**	.486**	.364**	.441**	.460**	.694**
D2	-	-	.445**	.356**	.396**	.336**	.304**	.346**	.638**
D3	-	-	-	.435**	.478**	.524**	.456**	.591**	.768**
D4	-	-	-	-	.438**	.369**	.391**	.398**	.624**
D5	-	-	-	-	-	.631**	.549**	.434**	.764**
D6	-	-	-	-	-	-	.472**	.561**	.733**
D7	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	.549**	.749**
D8	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	.763**
Total	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

VIII. Setting up the Norms for the ATS

The researcher proposes two types of norms for interpreting test scores. First, scores can be interpreted by the mean and SD derived from the full sample's responses. Second, Stanine norms are provided to offer a simplified scoring framework. These norms are intended to support researchers in related fields and assist school teachers in effectively identifying science aptitude among secondary school students.

These two Norms are shown in Table 6 and Table 7 below.

Table 6: *Mean, SD of the ATS (N=130)*

Test	Mean	SD
Aptitude Test in Science	20.5231	6.3931

Table 7: *Stanine Norm of the Aptitude Test in Science*

Stanine	Range of scores	No. of sample present	Level of Aptitude in Science
1	< 9	5	Low
2	9-13	13	Below Average
3	13-16	14	
4	16-19	20	Average
5	19-22	8	
6	22-25	21	
7	25-29	45	Above Average
8	29-30	2	
9	30	2	High

Discussion

The entire work was centered on the ‘development and validation’ of the ‘Aptitude Test in Science’ (ATS) for secondary-level learners. The test was developed and validated by the researchers to ensure its effectiveness in measuring science aptitude. Validity, a fundamental psychometric property, indicates the accuracy with which a tool measures what it is designed to assess.

To establish content validity, input was obtained from five teacher educators and subject matter experts. The researchers also calculated the Content Validity Index (CVI) for the test. Intrinsic validity was evaluated using the Pearson product-moment correlation method by analysing the correlations among item-subtest (dimension), subtest-subtest, and subtest-total test scores. All correlations were significant at the 0.01 level, demonstrating the test's strong intrinsic validity.

Initially, 46 items were constructed for the test. Following item analysis, 16 items were eliminated. The retained items had moderate difficulty levels (difficulty indices ranging from 40 to 87) and acceptable discrimination indices (ranging from 0.2 to 0.8), indicating their suitability in both difficulty and discrimination.

The test's reliability was assessed using the KR-20, resulting in a ‘reliability coefficient’ of 0.88. Additionally, split-half reliability was assessed at 0.86. These high reliability values indicate that the Aptitude Test in Science is a consistent and dependable tool for assessing science aptitude among secondary school students.

In conclusion, the Aptitude Test in Science (ATS) developed by the researchers exhibits robust psychometric properties. Therefore, it can serve as an effective tool for identifying secondary-level learners with potential and interest in pursuing the science stream. Additionally, the test can be used to assess learning outcomes in science. It also holds value for science educators and counsellors, enabling them to provide targeted guidance and support to students who score lower on the ATS.

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Early Childhood Care and Education in India in the Lens of NEP 2020: Foundation of Lifelong Learning

Debarati Das

M.Phil. Scholar

Department of Education

University of Gour Banga

West Bengal, India

Email: debaratid71@gmail.com

Kamalesh Karan

Assistant Professor

Department of Education

Kalyani Mahavidyalaya

West Bengal, India

Email: kamaleshkaran27@gmail.com

Abstract:

Early childhood, from birth to 6 years, is regarded as a critical phase for a child's cognitive, physical, motor, social, and emotional development, and the child's brain undergoes rapid development, indicating significant capacity for change. Currently, 'Early Childhood Care and Education' (ECCE) has emerged as a critical equity issue in the Indian context. ECCE implies a comprehensive, integrative program that includes nutrition, health, and infant and early childhood education, playing a crucial role in laying the foundation for lifelong learning while promoting overall development and well-being. SDG 4.2 aims to 'ensure that by 2030, all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care, and pre-primary education, thereby preparing them for primary education'. This goal is the highest priority and highlights the significance of this critical early phase for a child's holistic well-being and future academic success. In this context, NEP 2020 regards ECCE as the foundation of a child's holistic development. This study seeks to examine the proposals for new policy and the post-NEP 2020 policy review, and to navigate potential future paths for restructuring the ECCE with respect to the foundation of lifelong learning.



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Introduction

Ensuring that children receive the optimal start in life is an increasing priority among countries. Children reflect the future of every country. Every child should have the possibility for holistic growth and development to achieve their maximum potential (NCERT, 2019, Mondal & Mondal, 2025). The infancy period, spanning from birth to 6 years, is recognised as a vital phase encompassing the child's 'physical, socio-emotional, cognitive, and motor development' (Kaul & Sankar, 2009; Kaul, 2019; Kumar, 2023). In this lens, given that children's brains undergo significant development between the ages of 1 and 8, this period is considered a critical window for education (Doherty, 1997; UNESCO, 2022). High-quality early childhood experiences are crucial to children's growth and development. Research indicates that high-quality pre-school experiences positively influence children's school adaptations and academic performance in subsequent education (NCERT, 2019). Again, multidisciplinary studies in neuroscience, economics, and child development have shown that the early stages of life are critical, as a child's brain growth accelerates by age five (Haartsen, Jones & Johnson, 2016; Barnett, 1995; NCERT, 2019, p. 1). In this case, environmental circumstances in early childhood significantly influence the development of children's brain neural networks. Delivering appropriate stimulation at the proper time is essential for brain cell networking, which influences individuals' behaviour, thinking, and learning throughout their lives (NCERT, 2019, p. 1). Early childhood is considered the most crucial developmental stage in an individual's life, and 'Early Childhood Care and Education' (ECCE) plays a crucial role in laying the groundwork for academic achievement, lifelong learning, future health, socio-emotional growth, and financial prosperity (UNESCO, 2019, p. 7). The early years of childhood are considered essential for instilling fundamental values and social skills in children (Kaul & Sankar 2009). It is confided that these values are internalized as culture from the family. Compared with other educational tiers, it has demonstrated the largest societal returns, evidenced by a benefit-to-cost ratio of 7:1 (UNICEF, 2017; UNESCO, 2019, p. 7). The early experiences and environments of children significantly impact their future well-being, and adequately funding high-quality ECCE programs represents one of the most effective investments a nation can undertake to combat inequality, interrupt the intergenerational cycle of poverty, and enhance various individual and societal outcomes in later life. Carneiro and Heckman argued that investment in early infant development for underprivileged children yields an annual societal gain of 7 to 10 percent through enhanced personal success and production (Carneiro & Heckman, 2003). This early childhood phase is crucial for establishing enduring societal and individual habits and values (Kaul & Sankar, 2009, 2009, p.1; NCERT, 2019). Shashtri & Sarojkumari (2022) define pre-school, or ECCE, as an assortment of programs aimed at fostering children's comprehensive development before their admission to primary school (Mondal & Mondal, 2025). Investing in early infant care is essential by providing an emotionally nurturing and engaging playful atmosphere for each child, which is both their right and a means to establish a strong base for their future (NCERT, 2019). Moreover, numerous studies indicate that longer-term benefits and higher returns are achieved by spending during a child's first six years of life rather than investing at any subsequent period (Currie & Thomas, 1995; CECED, 2017; Mondal & Mondal, 2025). UNESCO (2022) highlights the inclusive ECCE as a pivotal investment in promoting 'social cohesion, gender equality, holistic development, and lifelong learning'. ECCE is seen as "a significant input to compensate

for early environmental deprivations at home by providing a stimulating environment to children” (Mohite & Bhatt, 2008). To improve pupils' learning outcomes in elementary education, every child must receive high-quality preschool experiences. Ensuring high-quality preschool education is a primary goal outlined by the 2030 ‘Agenda for Sustainable Development’ (NCERT, 2019).

The initial formal record of preschool Education as an organised undertaking in India originates from the latter part of the 19th century, when ‘Gijubhai Badheka’ and ‘Tarabai Modak’, among others, emerged as founders of this movement in India (Kaul & Sankar, 2009, p.3; NCERT, 2022, p.15). Inspired by ‘Madame Montessori’s travel to India, they founded pre-school education centres in Gujarat. Prior to India's independence in 1947, the demand for ECCE was predominantly met by voluntary organisations and private institutions, especially through preschool education (Kaul & Sankar 2009, p. 3). Subsequently, recognising the crucial implications of ECCE, following the adoption of the Indian Constitution in 1950, the Government of India (GoI) has transitioned from a welfare model reliant on private voluntary initiatives with government assistance to a developmental and rights-based framework (Mondal & Mondal, 2025). During the initial decades of independent India, ECCE was mainly entrusted to a limited number of voluntary and private groups (ibid), and this scenario persisted until the 3rd 5-year plan (1961-1966) (Mohite & Bhatt, 2008; Kaul & Sankar, 2009, p. 16).

On the other hand, the Kothari Commission (1964) advocated for the creation of pre-school institutions nationwide. The ‘National Policy on Education’ (NPE) and the establishment of the ‘National Children’s Board’ emphasise preschool education as a critical objective that influences subsequent success in education (NCERT, 2016, p.16). The 5th 5-year plan (1974-1979) showed a clear shift in focus from welfare for children to development (Kaul & Sankar 2009, p. 17). This transition culminated in the proclamation of the ‘National Policy for Children’ (1974), marking a conceptual shift towards ‘Integrated Child Development Services’ (ICDS) for children (Mohite & Bhatt, 2008; Kaul & Sankar, 2009, p. 17). In accordance to this Policy, the Indian government has designated the universal of ICDS as its principal strategy to fulfill the initial objective of ECCE under ‘Education for All’, aimed at enhancing ‘health, nutrition and preschool education services to children from pre-natal stage to age of six years and to pregnant and lactating mothers especially targeted for the poor and the deprived’ on a trial basis (NCERT, 2006; Mohite & Bhatt, 2008; Kaul & Sankar, 2009, p.19). Subsequent 5-year plans have consistently emphasised the importance of developing early childhood services as a strategic ‘investment in human resource development’ (Kaul & Sankar, 2009, p.17). The NPE (1986) regards ECCE as “an integral input the Human Resource Strategy, feeder and support program for primary education” (Gol, 1986; Kaul & Sankar, 2009, p.16; NCERT, 2022, p.16; Mondal & Mondal, 2025).

Following the implementation of the national policy in 1986, notable global changes also emerged, which accelerated the adoption of a rights-based approach to child development. The 1990s heralded a significant global advancement in ECCE with the establishment of the ‘United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child’ (CRC) in 1989, the ‘World Declaration on Education for All’ (EFA) in March 1990 in Jomtien, Thailand, the ‘Dakar Framework for Action’ on EFA, and the ‘Millennium Development Goals’ (MDGs) in 2000 (Mohite & Bhatt 2008; UNESCO, 2015, p. 10). These documents unequivocally identified ECCE as the primary goal for achieving EFA, asserting that ‘learning begins at birth’ (Mondal & Mondal, 2025). Also, the

primary goal of these conventions was to establish the recognition of ECCE as an essential part of basic schooling and to enhance and extend comprehensive ECCE, particularly for the most 'vulnerable and disadvantaged children' (UNESCO, 2015, p. 10).

In alignment with worldwide pledges, the GoI initiated the 'Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan'- a centrally financed program in collaboration with States in 2001-2002 to achieve 'Universal Elementary Education' (UEE). Article 21A of the Indian Constitution has been incorporated as a 'fundamental right' later than Article 21, stipulating that "The State shall provide free and compulsory education to all children aged six to fourteen years in such manner as the State may, by law, determine" (Kaul & Sankar, 2009, p. 15). The revised Article 45 ('Directive Principles of State Policy') of India's Constitution now stipulates that 'The State shall endeavour to provide ECCE for all children until they complete the age of six years'. Consequently, early childhood education programs were regarded as an integral component of the constitutional obligation. In 2001, the 86th Amendment of the Constitution established 'elementary education as a Fundamental Right for children' aged 6-14, thereby dissociating ECCE from this obligation. This provoked significant dissent from numerous professional organisations and the public society. As a result, ECCE has been incorporated as a constitutional provision; however, it is not a judicial right for each child, as stated in Article 45: "The State shall endeavour to provide ECCE for all children until they complete the age of six years" (GoI, 1949). The 'Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan' was reformed into the 'Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan', an 'Integrated Education Mission' including pre-primary and higher secondary education, effective from 2018 to 2019 (GoI, 2018). In 2013, the GoI implemented the National ECCE Policy, which articulates the vision for children below 6 years old and aligns with 'The Right to Free and Compulsory Education Act-2009' (RTE Act-2009), effective from April 2010, as well as Goal 4.2 of the SDGs 2030 endorsed by the Government (Panchal & Mohan, 2023). In this context, the NEP 2020 emphasizes the importance of early learning for all children aged 3 to 6 by 2030 (GoI, 2020). The after-policy execution phase is currently in full operation. Therefore, it is essential to reevaluate the proposals of the latest policy and the GoI's role in the post-policy execution phase to navigate potential future paths for restructuring the ECCE with respect to the foundation of lifelong learning.

Method and Sources of Materials

The study has primarily adopted the 'Policy Document Analysis' (PDA) method, and its approach is qualitative. PDA is basically 'a method for investigating the nature of a policy document in order to look at both what lies behind it and within it' (Cardno, 2018, p. 625). Here, pertinent policy proposals, i.e., the 'Union Ministries of Education and Women & Child Development', along with those from the 'National Council of Educational Research and Training' (NCERT) and the 'National Council for Teacher Education' of the GoI, have been examined in relation to the ECCE framework, particularly in the lens of within and after NEP 2020, to fulfill the research objectives. The current investigation has examined the following research purposes:

- 1) To examine the proposals of the new policy and review the post-NEP 2020 policy.
- 2) To navigate potential future paths for restructuring the ECCE with respect to the foundation of lifelong learning.

ECCE in the lens of NEP 2020: Policy propositions

The GoI made significant progress with the launch of its current NEP in 2020, more than 30 years after the previous substantial modification of the 'National Policy on Education' in 1986, amended in 1992. The implementation of prior educational policies has primarily emphasized accessibility and equity. However, one of the core proposals of the new policy is to regard ECCE as the cornerstone of a child's whole development. The latest policy notes that the existing 10+2 educational framework does not include children aged 3-6, as class 1 begins at age 6 (GoI, 2020, p. 7). The latest 5+3+3+4 framework incorporates a robust foundation starting at age 3, aiming to enhance holistic education, overall development, and well-being (ibid). This policy currently emphasises the prevailing challenges facing ECCE in India; quality ECCE remains unavailable, especially for children from 'socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds'. Robust investment in ECCE can ensure all children have access, allowing them to engage and thrive within the education system throughout their lives. The NEP 2020 commits to prioritising the universal provision of 'high-quality early childhood development, care, and education' by 2030, ensuring that all pupils entering Grade-1 are ready for school (GoI, 2020, p. 7). However, the entire range of NEP 2020's proposals can be divided into the following three broad domains: – 'curricula and pedagogy, universal provisioning of access to ECCE, and universal provisioning of ensuring equitable quality ECCE'. Let us focus on these policy areas–

Curricula and pedagogy:

The latest policy offered a curriculum and pedagogical structure for school education that is pertinent to address the developmental requirements and interests of pupils at various phases of their development. The suggested new educational framework for school education is structured as a 5+3+3+4 design, according to the age groups of '3-8, 8-11, 11-14, and 14-18' years, respectively (GoI, 2020). The new structure also incorporates a robust ECCE foundation from the age of 3, which not only enhances overall learning, holistic development, and the child's happiness but also fosters character development and the formation of well-balanced people with 21st-century skills. The ECCE curriculum will be refined to emphasise basic elements, fostering holistic, adaptable, multifaceted, and inquiry-driven learning i.e., 'alphabets, languages, numbers, counting, colours, shapes, indoor and outdoor play, puzzles and logical thinking, problem-solving, visual art, craft, drama, puppetry, music and movement' (GoI, 2020, p.7). Through this, the child's 'physical and motor development, cognitive development, social-emotional-moral development, cultural/artistic development, communication and early language development, and literacy and numeracy' will grow (ibid). To this end, the new policy stated that:

A National Curricular and Pedagogical Framework for Early Childhood Care and Education (NCPFECCE) for children up to the age of 8 will be developed by NCERT in two parts, namely, a sub-framework for 0-3 year-olds, and a sub-framework for 3-8 year-olds, aligned with the practices based on India's rich early childhood education tradition including art, stories, poetry, songs, and games, the newest research on ECCE, and national and international best practices. The framework will serve as a guide both for parents and for early childhood care and education institutions (GoI, 2020, p. 7).

Besides, the new policy suggests that ECCE is ‘flexible, multi-faceted, multi-level, play-based, activity-based, and inquiry-based learning’ and also involves a focus on developing ‘social capacities, sensitivity, good behaviour, courtesy, ethics, personal and public cleanliness, teamwork, and cooperation’ (GoI, 2020, p.7). All levels, including the foundational phase covering the ECCE curriculum and pedagogy, will implement ways of learning through experience, such as practical exercises, arts and sports-integrated education, and storytelling-driven pedagogy (GoI, 2020, p. 12). This policy promotes the use of ‘home language, mother tongue, or local language’ for instruction until 5th grade and ideally until 8th grade and beyond (GoI, 2020, p. 13; Mondal & Mondal, 2025). Also, the new policy observes that:

The responsibility for ECCE curriculum and pedagogy will lie with MHRD to ensure its continuity from pre-primary school through primary school. The planning and implementation of early childhood care and education curriculum will be carried out jointly by the Ministries of HRD, Women and Child Development (WCD), Health and Family Welfare (HFW), and Tribal Affairs. A special joint task force will be constituted for continuous guidance of the smooth integration of early childhood care and education into school education.

Universal access to ECCE: The main goal would be to ensure equitable access to top-notch ECCE nationwide in a staged approach, prioritizing shires and areas that are especially socio-economically disadvantaged (SED). The ECCE will be implemented through a significantly enhanced system of preschool educational institutes, which includes (a) independent Anganwadis (AWs); (b) AWs situated alongside primary institutes; (c) pre-primary institutes catering to children aged 5-6 years, located within existing primary institutes; and (d) independent preschools - will be further developed by recruiting personnel and educators specifically trained in ECCE curriculum and pedagogy (GoI, 2020, p.7).

The new policy reports that the absence of universal access to ECCE results in many children lagging behind in the first few weeks of first grade. To assure school readiness, NCERT and SCERTs will cooperate with parents and peers to create a 3-month playful ‘school preparation module’ for first-grade learners, emphasising alphabets, phonetics, vocabulary, colours, shapes, and numerals (GoI, 2020, p.7) which will help to develop children’s ‘physical, motor, cognitive, socio-emotional, ethical, cultural, artistic, communication, early language, literacy, and numeracy development’. The NEP 2020 states that all children will shift to a ‘Preparatory Class’ or ‘Balavatika’ before reaching 5 years, which has an ECCE-trained educator and playful learning activities. The ‘midday meal program, health check-ups, and growth monitoring’ services provided by the AW system shall be extended to readiness class pupils in both AW and the primary institute (GoI, 2020, p.7).

Universal provision to ensure equitable quality ECCE: To ensure equitable accessibility to ECCE, AW centers will be enhanced with superior facilities, play devices, and proficient AW staff/educators, featuring well-ventilated, child-friendly facilities that provide an enriched learning atmosphere. Additionally, ensuring a smooth shift from Anganwadi Centers to primary schools, children will visit local schools and be fully incorporated into school complexes, enabling AW children, guardians, and teachers to engage in school programs (GoI, 2020, p. 7).

NEP 2020 states that AW employees/teachers must hold professional credentials of 10+2 or above, accompanied by a six-month certificate program in ECCE, or below 10+2 with a 1-year diploma program. The 'Early Childhood Care and Education' training for AW employees/educators would be supervised by the 'Cluster Resource Centres of the School Education Department', which will conduct a minimum of 30 days of contact class for ongoing evaluation. In this context, the State Govt. has tasked the development of competently trained teachers for ECCE through phase-certain professional instruction, mentorship practices, and career mapping (GoI, 2020, p. 8). Essential provisions will be established for the early professional training of these teachers and their 'Continuous Professional Development'. All overarching proposals are currently in the execution phase across India. Furthermore, the post-NEP progress should be judiciously reviewed in the context of ECCE.

Reviewing ECCE: Post NEP 2020 Policy

After the implementation of the NEP 2020, the central government has initiated a series of measures consistent with the policy directives on ECCE. Like the 'National Curriculum Framework for Foundational Stage' (NCFFS) in 2022, formulated by NCERT, provides India's inaugural 'integrated curriculum framework for children' aged 3-8. It is predicated on the suggested revised school curriculum framework laid out in the NEP 2020, which aims to foster the all-round development of children through play, action, and inquiry-driven education (NCERT, n.d.). Additionally, NCERT is producing a preparedness package for the preparatory class prior to class 1, emphasising play-driven learning aimed at enhancing 'cognitive, affective, and psychomotor skills, early reading and numeracy'. The new policy notes that the lack of universal access to ECCE results in a significant number of children lagging behind in the initial weeks of first Grade. Based on a new policy report, the MoE is establishing a crucial foundation for early learners to facilitate future education through the implementation of a 'National Mission on Foundational Literacy and Numeracy', which aims to ensure that all pupils achieve these competencies by Grade 3 in primary school. The MoE initiated 'National Initiative for Proficiency in Reading with Understanding and Numeracy' (NIPUN Bharat) through Samagra Shiksha in July 2021, with the aim of assuring that every child achieves 'foundational literacy and numeracy' by Grade 3 (GoI, 2021). To attain the NIPUN Bharat objective by 2026-27, the essential involvement of all provinces and Union Territories (UTs) is imperative, especially in developing state-appropriate, stage-specific plans, ensuring teacher affordability and capacity formation, and selecting a pool of instructors to provide educational support to teachers (Modal & Mondal, 2025). Consequently, Samagra Shiksha is an integrated initiative that spans all educational levels from pre-primary to post-secondary, aiming to provide universal access to quality education for all children. It has been reformed to prioritise basic literacy and numeracy (GoI, 2021). Again, NISHTHA is an integrated teacher preparation program introduced at various stages of school education to enhance quality and build teachers' capacity for basic reading and numeracy (GoI, 2021). The new policy notes that the maximum number of students is already lagging in Grade 1 due to insufficient universal access to ECCE. In accordance with the recommendations of NEP 2020, the NCERT produced the 3-month playful 'School Preparation Module –Vidya Pravesh' in July 2021, which can be customised or accepted by Provinces and UTs according to their requirements (GoI, 2021).

Another subsequent development following the NEP has been noted: to enhance the comprehensive ECCE framework in Anganwadis, the 'Ministry of Women and Child Development' (MWCD) of the GoI constituted a National ECCE Taskforce in March 2022. This taskforce is tasked with delivering action-oriented proposals aimed at boosting the capacity and perception of the Anganwadi system as an educational framework and the Anganwadi centre as a learning hub (GoI, 2022, p. 1). Following the introduction of the NCFES in 2022 by NCERT, the Union MWCD has recently unveiled a 'National Curriculum for Early Childhood Care and Education' in 2024, titled 'Aadharshila', specifically designed for children 3-6 years old (Mondal & Mondal, 2025). This curriculum incorporates all facets of development, including 'physical/motor, cognitive, language and literacy, socio-emotional, cultural/aesthetic' and good habits, in accordance with the new policy and the NCFES 2022 (ibid; GoI, 2020). To facilitate the seamless implementation of this curriculum, the MoE has launched Navchetana – the 'National Framework of Early Childhood Stimulation' in 2024, aimed at acquainting parents, Anganwadis, Anganwadi employees, and ASHA staff in India about overall development in early childhood language, literacy, numeracy, sensory skills, and an activity-oriented curriculum (GoI, 2024a). This Navchetana will encourage Anganwadi Staff and Caretakers to deliver overall early stimulation about receptive caregiving and developmentally appropriate early education (GoI, 2024b; Mondal & Mondal, 2025). Now, let us see how to navigate the future path to ECCE.

Potential Pathways

ECCE's endeavors primarily focus on curriculum development and teacher training about contemporary curricula, while remaining relatively silent on enhancing fair access to quality ECCE schools, teacher recruiting efforts, and teacher remuneration. The provision of state funds for enhancing the ECCE landscape has not yet been resolved. The initial stage of post-policy developments presents an opportunity to tackle daunting challenges through potential pathways. Given the nature of challenges, the subsequent future paths should be contemplated in the post-policy operational stage-

First, the MWCD may assume responsibility for children's 'health and nutrition' from ages 3 to 6. The MoE assumes complete responsibility for preschool education (ages 3 to 6), offering clarity of roles and an adequate distribution of resources. Hence, a coordinated realignment of tasks between the MoE and the MWCD is necessary. The two sectors of the central government must synchronise their ECCE priorities, plans, and practices with the objectives of the NEP 2020 for successful execution across India. This synchronization must also be sustained at the state level. This strategic restructuring would not only define ministerial responsibilities but also facilitate the effective allocation of resources and funds.

Second, States ought to allocate resources for a comprehensive, one-time assessment and development of all essential elements needed in an ECCE classroom. This can be evaluated from the perspectives of pedagogy, usability, and educational resources. States may take in this effort to establish a continuum and coherence with the FLN curriculum.

Third, the study of the union budget indicates that the allocated funds per classroom and the total number of classes are inadequate to provide quality ECCE on a broad scale. In the financial year 2023-24, the budget allocation for ECCE is Rs. 1,117 crore. A slight rise in this can enable states to offer an extra classroom. Similarly, State governments ought to devote resources to

establish preschool sections in high-enrollment government schools and, if required, enhance nearby Anganwadis. States should emphasise the proportion of educators in ECCE classrooms, especially in instances where a qualified instructor is absent, or assign an additional educator, especially for 5-6-year-olds, in nearby Anganwadis.

Fourth, in addition to a rigorous monitoring, regulation, and review system for ECCE, an augmented budgetary allocation is needed (UNESCO, 2006) to support the phased planning of ECCE to achieve goals by 2030. Hence, to achieve universal ECCE by 2030, India must increase its expenditure from an average of Rs 8,297 to Rs 32,500 and Rs 46,000 per child, per year, for AWC and kindergarten, respectively, while allocating 1.5-2.2 percent of its GDP (Bal 2025; Mondal & Mondal, 2025). Furthermore, the Central and State governments must promise to enhance budgetary allocations for the identification, recruitment, training, support, and retention of dedicated teachers at the pre-primary level.

Fifth, enhance data systems and establish a robust inspection framework for nearby Anganwadis and preschool sections within government schools. Enhanced data availability could facilitate review, reflection, and requisite corrective measures, as well as thorough monitoring of ECCE classes. Periodic school preparation surveys are essential for evaluating the overall state of the system. A comprehensive assessment survey could serve as a crucial forerunner to the analysis of results from existing achievement surveys done at the conclusion of the basic schooling period, including the 'National Achievement Survey' and the 'Foundational Learning Study'.

Sixth, a broad awareness campaign can be initiated for parents, highlighting their crucial role in their child's learning. Provide parents with the necessary resources, tools, and guidance to facilitate active participation in home learning activities, thereby enhancing the learning experience beyond formal environments.

Seventh, India should introduce a comprehensive system of government-funded teacher training in a phased manner, as a large section of 'Integrated Teacher Education Programme' (ITEP)-based institutions is compromising on standards and norms. Furthermore, ECCE aims to specialist childcare service suppliers by substituting contractual personnel with permanent, qualified, salaried educators, while enhancing working conditions.

Lastly, advocating for multilingualism while acknowledging children's native languages is essential for guaranteeing fair and high-quality access to ECCE Education services (Mondal & Mondal, 2025). The disparity among the child's native language, home tongue, regional language, and state language must be diminished at this period. Both governments must take immediate action to address variations in children's outcomes stemming from linguistic disparities in their homes, communities, and educational institutions. So, the child's language at home and in the community should be used as the medium of education at the basic stage.

Concluding Remarks

Presently, India occupies a prestigious worldwide standing due to its population composition. With almost 54% of its demography below 25 years old, the country can leverage a substantial economic dividend as this youthful labour enters the labour market and engages in economic activity. In India, the issue of providing food services to the 158.7 million children aged 0 to 6 (Census Report, 2011) for their all-around development is multifaceted. Therefore, India must prioritise a child's initial years by implementing a range of national and international best

practices to provide a robust foundation for ECCE (Mondal & Mondal, 2025). To fully harness this potential, it is essential for India to properly allocate all available assets regarding education and skill development, ensuring that the youth can make significant contributions to the economy. Worldwide, the evidence unequivocally indicates that expenditures in ECCE are crucial to realize this benefit. Adopting an integrated strategy for a child's health, nutrition, academic achievement, societal-emotional growth, and financial productivity is a viable means of reforming ECCE and attaining SDG 4.2 by 2030 (Mondal & Mondal, 2025). In recognition of this goal, the country's NEP 2020 has accorded significant focus to ECCE, incorporating it as a crucial part of school education and integrating it into the curriculum at the basic stages, including first and second grade. Likewise, India has just introduced an NCFFS (2022) to facilitate planning and execution. Delivering outstanding preschool education in a structured environment for children over three years old is a primary focus of the NEP 2020 (NCERT, 2022, p. 2). Historically, India has established a progressive policy framework to emphasise the importance of ECCE as a vital phase in human development. Nonetheless, this ECCE-focused approach required additional funding and advocacy to implement. It is clear that the lofty policy target of attaining universal, all-round, top-notch ECCE within the lens of SDG 4.2 can be realised through appropriate, strategic, and multifaceted action plans, coupled with robust political commitment. Hence, India will deliver quality ECCE that will help children lead productive lives.

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The Overlooked Dimension: Perspectives of Psychology Students about Philosophical Approaches to Educational Counselling

Adrija Chattopadhyay, PhD
Assistant Professor (Grade I)
Amity Institute of Education
Amity University
Kolkata, West Bengal, India.
adadrija89@gmail.com

Anamika Kar, PhD
Assistant Professor (Grade II)
Amity Institute of Education
Amity University
Kolkata, West Bengal, India.
anamika.kar1@gmail.com

Sanjoy Dutta
Assistant Professor
Amity Institute of Education
Amity University
Kolkata, West Bengal, India.
sanjoyduttanainanpara@gmail.com

Abstract

The present study explores the perspectives of undergraduate Psychology students on the use of philosophical approaches in educational counselling. The study was conducted through a qualitative descriptive survey with 100 students from four colleges in the Kolkata and Howrah regions, using stratified random and simple random sampling. A self-made standardized questionnaire was developed. Its content validity and Reliability (Cronbach Alpha value- .71) were checked. Percentage, Mean, SD, t-test, and ANOVA were used for data analysis. The result revealed that about half of the respondents (48%) had a low level of perception regarding the use of philosophical approaches in educational counselling. A significant difference was observed in the perception of philosophical approaches in educational counselling among psychology students, based on habitat area and educational background, with no gender-specific difference. Urban students and those from an Arts background showed a higher level of perception in this area. To develop students' conceptual understanding, Philosophy and Psychology should be integrated. Recommendations are needed to enhance counselling training and also to strengthen interdisciplinary engagement.



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Introduction

Though different in orientation, Philosophy and Psychology both share a type of intellectual connection. Through various methodological lenses, both disciplines explore human cognition, behaviour, values, and meaning-making. Empirical approaches are used in Psychology to understand the functioning of human beings, while Philosophy offers ethical reflection, critical reasoning, and conceptual clarity. Today, various philosophical approaches, such as moral reasoning, reflective enquiry, logic-based analysis, and existential questioning, have gained prominence in educational counselling. It provides counselors with a deeper level of knowledge to address students' confusion and dilemmas in academic choices, values, life purposes, and identity. Instead of all these, the perception of psychology students toward the use of philosophical approaches in counselling remains an unexplored domain. If future counselors are open to philosophical approaches, then only the interdisciplinary approach combining Philosophy and Psychology can be used in the educational arena. Examining these perceptions helps expose gaps in exposure, professional readiness, and curriculum. Therefore, the main aim of this study was to examine the conceptual understanding of psychology students regarding integrating philosophical approaches in educational counseling, based on gender, academic qualifications, and habitat area. The findings can show a proper path to the future curriculum makers, educational institutions, and teacher educators to enhance training related to philosophical counselling. Highlighting various socio-educational factors useful for understanding students' acceptance of philosophical approaches, a broader dialogue can be developed by integrating philosophical thinking into counselling pedagogy.

Statement of the Problem

Philosophy and Psychology, though they have different orientations, are closely connected. Various studies have observed their interdependence and reciprocity. So, the researcher wants to measure psychology students' perceptions of the use of philosophical approaches in Educational Counseling. Henceforth, the title of the study has been framed as - *'The Overlooked Dimension: Perspectives of Psychology Students about Philosophical Approaches to Educational Counselling.'*

Objectives

To find out the perspectives of Psychology Students about Philosophical Approaches to Educational Counseling.

To understand if there was any significant difference in the perspectives of Psychology Students about Philosophical Approaches to Educational Counseling based on gender.

To know if there was any significant difference in the perspectives of Psychology Students about Philosophical Approaches to Educational Counseling based on habitat area.

To find out if there was any significant difference in the perspectives of Psychology Students coming from various backgrounds of study about Philosophical Approaches to Educational Counseling.

Hypotheses

Psychology Students had a positive perception about using Philosophical Approaches to Educational Counseling.

There was no significant difference in the perspectives of Psychology Students regarding Philosophical Approaches to Educational Counseling based on gender.

There was no significant difference in Psychology Students' perspectives on Philosophical Approaches to Educational Counseling across habitat areas.

There was no significant difference in the perspectives of Psychology Students from various study backgrounds regarding Philosophical Approaches to Educational Counseling.

Definition of the Operational Terms

i) Overlooked Dimension-

It refers to an aspect of a situation that is not considered, included, or noticed. Here, in this study, the discussion focuses on the perspectives of Psychology students on using philosophical approaches in educational counselling.

ii) Perspectives-

Perspective is the ability to think about a situation or problem in a reasonable and wise way.

iii) Psychology Students-

Psychology students refer to undergraduate psychology students from four different colleges in the Kolkata and Howrah regions.

iv) Philosophical Approaches-

Philosophical approaches refer to the philosophical ways of using values, ethical approaches, life awareness, etc.

v) Educational Counseling-

Educational counselling is the process in which a counsellor helps students understand social, academic, and personal issues through a supportive, reassuring relationship.

Delimitations

- The study was delimited to 100 samples from four colleges in Howrah and Kolkata regions.
- All the samples were taken from the undergraduate level.
- Only the Psychology students were taken here.
- Gender, Habitat area, and Background of studies were treated as categorical variables.

Significance of the Study

- As the study integrates philosophical, as well as psychological practices, it paves the way for enhancing interdisciplinary counselling education.
- Curriculum development, with improved course design, can be based on identifying gaps in students' exposure to philosophical concepts of counselling.
- The students can also be professionally prepared to become better future counselors.
- Targeted educational interventions were designed to understand students' perceptions of socio-educational differences.
- It encourages various self-reflection processes among students, such as ethics, meaning, and values, which are key components of effective counselling.

Reviews of Related Literature

Corlet. et al. (2024) conducted a study to understand university students' approach to online counselling. A questionnaire was developed and standardized. This descriptive survey was analysed using inferential statistics, which showed that the students liked online counselling for its flexibility and convenience, but expressed concerns about trust, discomfort, and a lack of personal information. Male students were more likely to seek online counseling than their female counterparts. Policymakers and educational institutions may have gained insight from this study. Khatun (2024) conducted a study to find out the combined impact of philosophical and psychological counselling on technology integration in education. Technology raises anxiety and stress among students as well as teachers. Philosophical intervention was useful for fostering ethical awareness and critical engagement, while psychological counselling was useful for reducing resistance and anxiety. So, interdisciplinary activities combining both areas in developing educational technology can be a great help. Knapp & Tjeltveit (2005) conducted a study to examine how various educational counsellors critically evaluated the scope of practice, training curriculum, evidence of effectiveness, methods, and code of ethics of philosophy in helping individuals or groups in practical work. This study discusses the need to understand and evaluate individual philosophical counselors' potential to use philosophy in helping clients in need. Meera (1989) in her study discussed the theoretical as well as philosophical aspects of psychology and how, in everyday life, such skills are necessary. Careful amalgamation of Science related to Psychology and theory related to Philosophy can lead to a great future. Richardson (2023) conducted a study to find out the impact of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) as a psychological therapy model and Logic-Based Therapy (LBT) on the subjects who were suffering from moral injuries like shame, spiritual crisis, guilt, etc. The literature review-based analysis proved the effectiveness of these therapies in the past, and they conducted an experiment with these two therapies, providing a positive result. Rho (2013) conducted a study to examine the Philosophy and focus of counsellors in the counselling approach. Various literature reviews and theses were analysed. The result indicated that philosophy depends on social constructivism, positive psychology, and effects. In contrast, counsellors viewed counselling as a minute attitude observation and as being the partner and coach of the client in need. Sheikh (2024) conducted a study to examine the effects of various philosophy-related counselling interventions on nurses. As nurses are there to look after not only the physical but also the mental health of patients, through a case study, the researcher found that philosophical counselling techniques positively influence the mental well-being of the subjects. Shreelakshmi et al. (2023) in their study used the Attitude towards Seeking Professional Help Scale and a peer-reviewed questionnaire to understand the attitude of students who went through counselling during the school period and the students who did not have such an experience. The t-test showed that there was no significant difference between the two groups in their attitudes towards counselling, but there was a significant difference in their attitudes towards counsellors. Waitzman (2024) conducted a study to identify the role of philosophical counselling in addressing various life challenges and in developing personal resilience. Philosophical approaches such as Socratic Philosophy, Existentialism, and Stoicism were used, and based on them, a philosophical counselling model was prepared. A systematic literature analysis was also done. After applying the model to real respondents, it was shown that the manageability dimension

improved. So, it was proved that philosophical counselling can strengthen personal resilience by improving the understanding of life situations and providing them with meaning.

Methodology

i) Variables

Perception of Psychology Students using philosophical approaches in educational counselling was regarded as the dependent variable, and Psychology students were regarded as the independent variable. Gender, habitat area, and the background of the study were treated as categorical variables in this study.

ii) Samples

A total of 100 samples were taken in this study. 25 samples from each undergraduate college were selected. As this was a quantitative study, a probability sampling technique was used. First of all, four colleges of the Kolkata and Howrah region were selected by Stratified Random Sampling. Then, 25 Psychology students were selected from each college by simple random sampling, for a total of 100.

Categorical Variables	Number of Samples
Male Psychology Students	65
Female Psychology Students	95
Urban Psychology Students	42
Rural Psychology Students	58
Students from Science Background	30
Students from Arts Background	43
Students from Other Backgrounds	27

iii) Research Design

The researcher used a quantitative descriptive survey in this study. A self-made questionnaire (Consisting of 25 items) was standardized by testing the content Validity (Checked by three subject experts) and also by checking the reliability by Cronbach Alpha (.71). After administering the questionnaire on 100 samples, the data were analysed through Percentage, Mean, SD, t-test, and ANOVA.

Hypothesis-I

Psychology Students had a Positive Perception of Using Philosophical Approaches in Educational Counseling.

Table-1

Levels of Perception	Percentage of Perception
High	23%
Medium	29%
Low	48%

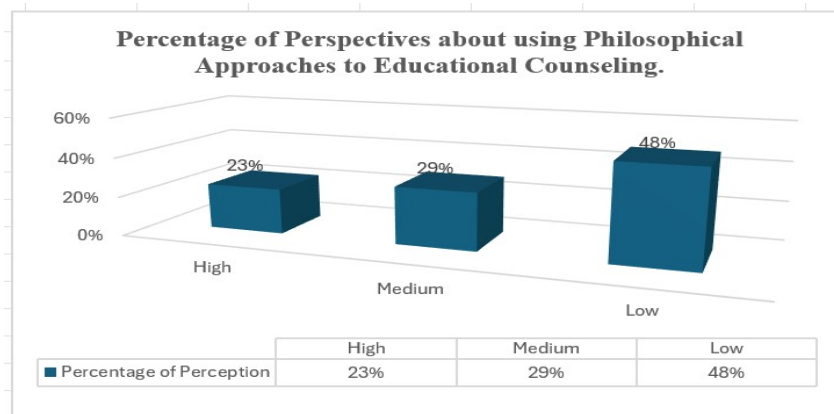


Chart 1: Describing the Percentage of Perception about using Philosophical Approaches to Educational Counseling

Table 1 and Chart 1 describe the percentage of Psychology students' perception of using philosophical approaches in educational counselling. Most Psychology students (48%) had a low level of perception of the use of philosophical approaches in educational counselling, while 29% had a medium level and 23% had a high level.

Hypothesis II

There was no significant difference in the perspectives of Psychology Students about Philosophical Approaches to Educational Counseling based on gender.

Table-2

Gender	Total Number of trainee teachers	Mean	SD	T test
Male Psychology Students	39	23.12	3.05	0.5061
Female Psychology Students	61	23.45	3.26	

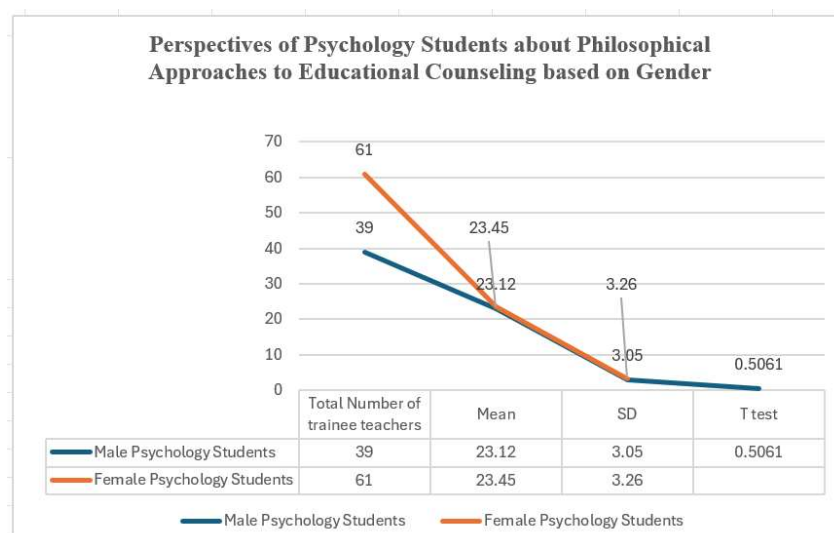


Chart- 2 describing Perspectives of Psychology Students about Philosophical Approaches to Educational Counseling based on Gender

Table 2 and Chart 2 indicate that the mean gained score (23.12) for male Psychology students was lower than that of female Psychology students (23.45). The table t value 0.5061 was lower

than the table t value 1.96 at 98 degrees of freedom at the 0.05 level of significance. Henceforth, the hypothesis was accepted, and it was shown that there was no significant difference in the perspectives of Psychology Students regarding Philosophical Approaches to Educational Counseling by gender.

Hypothesis III

There was no significant difference in the perspectives of Psychology Students about Philosophical Approaches to Educational Counseling based on habitat area.

Table-3

Habitat Area	Total Number of trainee teachers	Mean	SD	T test
Urban Psychology Students	42	27.56	3.89	5.9236
Rural Psychology Students	58	23.41	3.11	

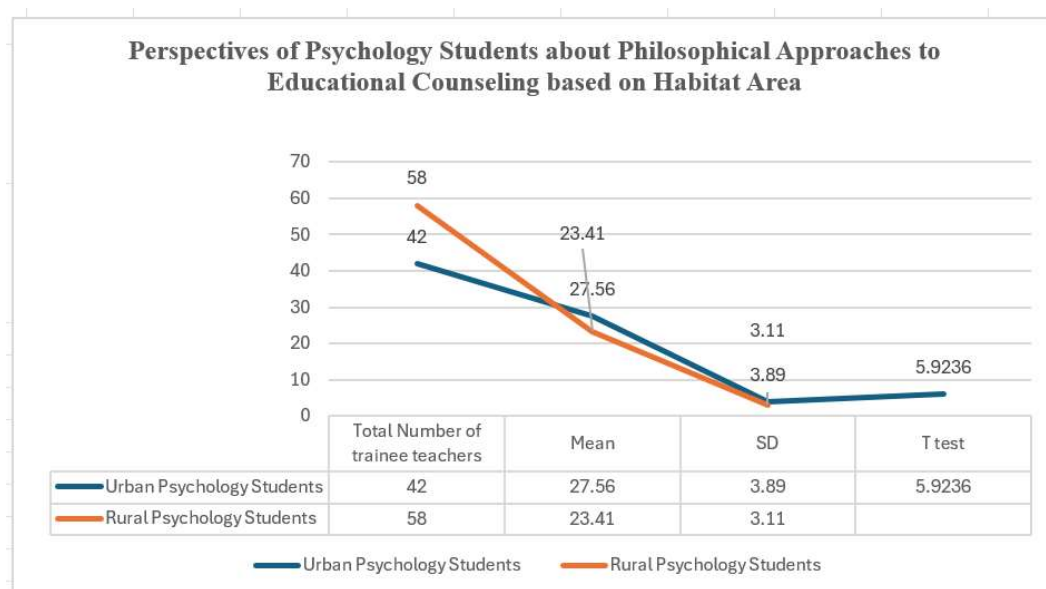


Chart- 3 describing Perspectives of Psychology Students about Philosophical Approaches to Educational Counseling based on Habitat Area

Table 3 and Chart 3 show that the mean gained score (27.56) of urban psychology students was higher than the mean gained score (23.41) of rural psychology students. The table t value 5.9236 was higher than the table t value 1.96 at 98 degrees of freedom at a 0.05 level of significance. Henceforth, the hypothesis was rejected, and it was demonstrated that there was a significant difference in the perspectives of Psychology Students regarding Philosophical Approaches to Educational Counseling across habitat areas.

Hypothesis IV

There was no significant difference in the perspectives of Psychology Students from various study backgrounds regarding Philosophical Approaches to Educational Counseling.

Table-4

Samples	Source of Variation	SS	Df	MS	F value	P value
Psychology Students coming from Science Background	Between Groups	254.54	2	122.77	9.63	<0.05
Psychology Students coming from Arts Background	Within Groups	1236.54	97	12.75		
Psychology Students coming from Other Backgrounds	Corrected Total	1482.08	99			

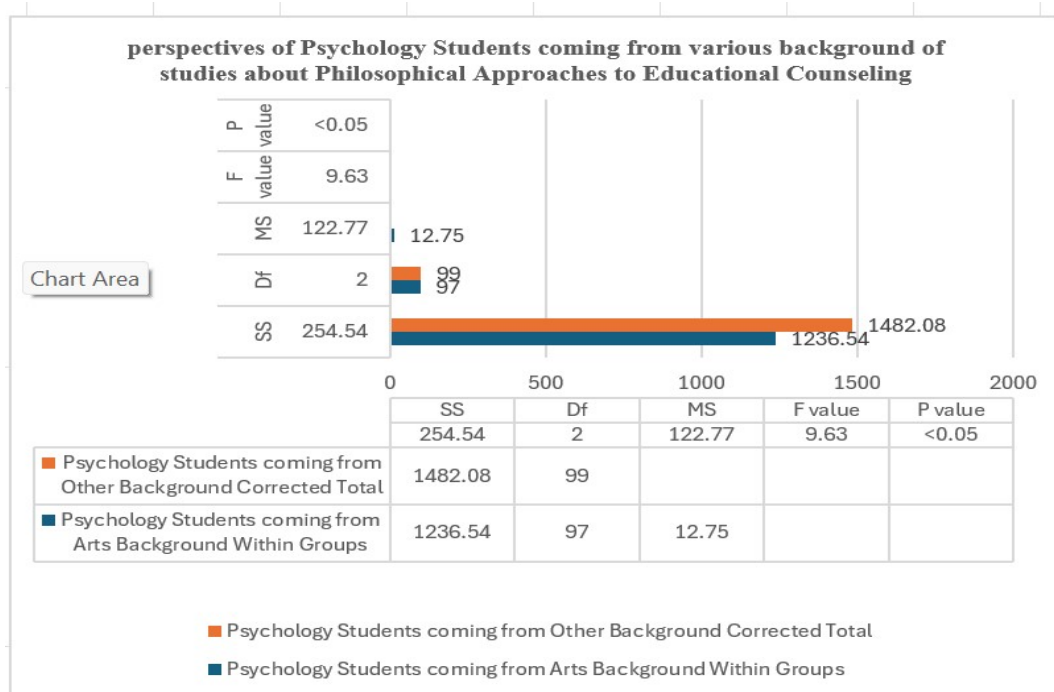


Chart 4 describing perspectives of Psychology Students coming from various backgrounds of studies about Philosophical Approaches to Educational Counseling

Table 4 and Chart 4 describe that the F value (9.63) was greater than the critical f value at 0.05 and the df (2,97). A p-value less than 0.05 indicates a significant difference. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected, indicating a significant mean difference. Therefore, based on the ANOVA results, it can be concluded that there was no significant difference in the perspectives of Psychology Students from various study backgrounds regarding Philosophical Approaches to Educational Counseling.

Findings

- Most Psychology students (48%) had a low level of awareness of the use of philosophical approaches in educational counselling. 29% of Psychology students had a medium level of

perception of the use of philosophical approaches in educational counselling, and 23% had a high level of perception.

- There was no significant difference in the perspectives of Psychology Students about Philosophical Approaches to Educational Counseling based on gender.
- There was a significant difference in the perspectives of Psychology Students about Philosophical Approaches to Educational Counseling based on habitat area.
- Urban Psychology students can have greater access to and understanding of philosophical approaches in educational counselling, as they are more likely to encounter technological advancements, new research, and discoveries that can lead them to see that philosophical concepts can also be applied in counselling.
- There was a significant difference in the perspectives of Psychology Students from various study backgrounds regarding Philosophical Approaches to Educational Counseling.
- Students from an Arts background had a high perception of using Philosophical approaches in educational counselling, as they may have a clear understanding of philosophical ideas. Thus, they can understand the importance of various Philosophical approaches in educational counselling. In contrast, the Science students had the lowest perception of these concepts due to their limited exploration of them.

Conclusion

The study uncovered noteworthy insights into the perspectives of Psychology students regarding the assimilation of various philosophical approaches in educational counselling. The percentage analysis revealed that about half of the samples had a low perception of the integration of philosophy into educational counselling, indicating an inadequate understanding of its relevance. The gender of the samples did not show any difference in perception, whereas academic background and habitat area did. Due to prior exposure to various philosophical contexts and greater access to academic resources, students from Arts and urban backgrounds showed a higher level of appreciation for the use of philosophical approaches in educational counselling. So, if there can be an interdisciplinary system of education that combines philosophical and psychological approaches, reasoning ability, the ability to navigate various life questions, and ethical sensitivity can be improved. It is the need of the hour that educational institutions arrange various curricular and co-curricular activities to encourage philosophical enquiry within educational counselling training. From the study, it can be concluded that broadening psychology students' understanding of philosophical counselling will lead to more critical, reflective, and holistic counselling practices. A combination of both disciplines in the future can support learners' emotional, academic, and existential growth and development.

Recommendations and suggestions

- Various interdisciplinary modules combining Psychology and Philosophy can be introduced at the school and college level.
- Workshops can be organised on various philosophical counselling approaches, such as Stoicism, Socratic Dialogue, and Existentialism.
- Case studies supervised philosophical counselling sessions, and case studies should be used to provide experiential learning opportunities.

- Faculty training should be provided to teachers to model the integration of various philosophical thinking into the counselling process.
- Research engagement among the students should be traversed to explore various philosophical applications in real-world counselling circumstances.

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Assessing the Factors of Effectiveness of Migrated Teachers in an Unfamiliar Cultural Context

Hafijul Shaikh, PhD
Former Ph.D. Research Scholar
Department of Education
The University of Burdwan
West Bengal, India.
Email: hafijul.shaikh@gmail.com

Prof. K. N. Chattopadhyay, PhD
Professor
Department of Education
The University of Burdwan
West Bengal, India.
Email: knchatto@gmail.com

Abstract

Teachers are recruited and transferred nationally, which is one of the unique features of the Navodaya Vidyalaya system. Educational practice outside the native state affects the sustainability and effectiveness of migrant teachers, given the heterogeneity of cultural contexts. In India, every state and union territory has its own unique language, cultural ethos, and ways of living. Teachers' migration is influenced by factors related to teacher effectiveness. The present study aims to explore the most priority factors in the effectiveness of migrated teachers in an unfamiliar cultural context. The study is characterized by descriptive survey research. A total of 121 migrated teachers have been randomly selected as participants from 18 Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalayas across West Bengal, India. The data have been gathered by administering the Kulsum (2011) teacher effectiveness measuring scale. A pilot survey was conducted on 23 samples to confirm the scale's reliability, just before the final data collection. Applying the Cronbach's Alpha test yielded an excellent alpha value ($\alpha = .997$). The investigators have formulated several null hypotheses to examine the impact of demographic and teacher effectiveness factors on teacher effectiveness. The Cronbach's Alpha test, independent-samples t-test, ANOVA, and Pearson's correlation coefficient have been run in IBM SPSS Statistics 23 to analyze the data and interpret the results. In the study, the investigators have explored that 9.09% of the migrated teachers are highly effective. Except for marital status, the demographic variables do not affect teacher effectiveness. The five factors are perfectly correlated ($r=1.00$) and together account for 100% of the variance in teacher effectiveness ($R^2=1.00$). Knowledge of subject matters is the best predictor of effectiveness.



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Keywords: Teacher effectiveness, Migrated teachers, Unfamiliar cultural background, Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya.

Introduction

Education is fundamental for shaping and moulding the next generation of citizens to manifest their full human potential (NEP, 2020). It demands equally distributed effectiveness of the teachers. Despite personal, family, and other factors influencing pupils' academic achievement, many researchers concluded that teachers are among the most influential school-based factors (RAND Corporation, 2022). Effective teachers make their instructional sessions safer and easier so that pupils can express themselves in a healthier and prosperous environment. The teacher mostly contributes to students' success (Toropova et al., 2021). India is a culturally diverse country, and for its renowned diversity, the government has gifted many global-standard and well-equipped schools (e.g., Navodaya Vidyalaya) to preserve the culture and grow respect among students for each other. This type of schooling system compulsorily practises the scheme of national integration. Students are invited from their native district to this school. This schooling system reinforces national integration through migration policy that moves people from Hindi-speaking to non-Hindi-speaking areas and vice versa (Navodaya Vidyalaya Samiti, 2020). Providing high-quality education to children requires committed teachers, who are the heart of the educational system. The school is a residential system characterised by cultural diversity because teachers are appointed from all over India (Navodaya Vidyalaya Samiti, 2020), irrespective of caste, creed, mother tongue, state of domicile, or religion, and students are from their native areas. Due to the global integration of knowledge and the worldwide shortage of qualified teachers (Azoulay, 2022; European Commission, 2018; Ingersoll, 2017; Sutch et al., 2016), many countries have hired expatriate teachers. Research evidence demonstrated that teachers' effectiveness varied significantly between expatriate and native teachers due to differences in cultural backgrounds. As explored by Sodhi (2010), teaching with a similar cultural background inspires teachers to a higher level of effectiveness; in contrast, a relatedly unfamiliar and close school environment makes teachers less effective. The effectiveness of local resident teachers was higher than that of expatriate teachers, and students benefited more from local teachers than from expatriate teachers (Mbuthi & Orodho, 2014). Despite all JNVs being unique in their features, districts within a state differ with respect to the geographical and socioeconomic factors in which the JNVs are situated. Some local communities (e.g., tribal or nomadic populations) have a specific agenda and little interest in education. They belong to an educationally disadvantaged section, and students from the area cannot satisfactorily meet the requirements for achievement level (Goswami, 2015). Coban et al. (2020) argued that teachers' effectiveness decreases when students' achievement is low, and in the same school, another classroom shows a higher level of effectiveness. Similarly, Ronfeldt et al. (2013) suggested that teacher effectiveness varies due to teacher migration from higher-performing to lower-performing schools and that this migration significantly affects teacher turnover. Creating healthy and effective contact with different ethnic groups requires the ability to adapt to others' cultures in unfamiliar settings, which is a primary quality of effective practitioners (Bal & Kokalan, 2022). Efficacious outcome of pedagogical practice depends on an effective teacher (Sadeghi et al., 2021). The impact of effective teachers is prime for enhancing pupils' scholastic attainment and achieving the excellent quality of education towards meeting the institutional objectives; thus, it is urgent to guarantee the responsible factors of teachers' effectiveness and performance (Sadeghi et al., 2021). The Navodaya Vidyalaya Samity provides incentives, e.g., rent-

free housing, special allowance, and admission of wards of teachers with free boarding, to encourage better-quality teachers (Navodaya Vidyalaya Samity, 2020). Teachers' professional commitment leads to the desire and successful outcomes of an educational institution. The teacher is the heart of the education system and is held in the highest respect in society (NEP, 2020). In some contexts, teacher effectiveness depends on students' academic achievement. The transfer of a highly effective teacher to another school can decrease the effectiveness (Goswami, 2015). In Navodaya Vidyalayas, teaching transactions vary due to their transfer policy, which is a special feature of the Navodaya Vidyalaya schooling system. A nationwide study found that some categorical variables make only a small contribution to teacher effectiveness. A gap revealed the need to explore the other factors that contribute most to teacher effectiveness and identify how they differ. The effectiveness of some teachers is sufficiently aligned with a desirable outcome, while that of others is not, and this disequilibrium needs to be thoroughly researched. Classroom transaction, performance, and pupil success are the best indicators of effective teaching, and experience or background were not reliable factors in identifying effectiveness (RAND Corporation, 2022). The researchers explore the effectiveness in a situation in which migrated teachers are appointed from diverse cultural contexts in India. Migration refers to teachers' movement from one school to another (Rinke, 2008; Ingersoll, 2001). Students (78.25%) and teachers (64.43%) in Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalayas stated that they were unwilling to migrate to another JNV due to unfamiliar language and displeased lifestyle (El-Hajji, 2013). Besides teaching, teachers in JNVs work under heavy workloads (Sing & Kumar, 2012). Soanes & Sungoh (2019) found that emotionally balanced teachers were more effective, and that teachers in the science faculty achieved a higher level of teaching effectiveness.

Teacher Effectiveness

Teacher effectiveness is defined as sincerely accepting the challenges of teaching, creating a democratic classroom environment that fosters courage, and motivating pupils towards self-regulated learning, which will be achieved through a truly pedagogical praxis that integrates contemporary skills and competencies.

Teacher effectiveness refers to the practical outcomes of teachers' classroom activities that underlie learners' success (Jupp, 2009). Strong et al. (2011) defined teacher effectiveness as comprising personal factors and the practice of various teacher activities to prepare pupils to achieve learning outcomes.

Migrated teachers

Migrated teachers are those appointed by the Navodaya Vidyalaya Samity to various Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalayas in West Bengal. Their mother tongue is not Bengali, and their domicile state/union territory is not West Bengal. According to Rinke (2008) and Ingersoll (2001), migrated teachers refer to those teachers who move from one school to another without changing scale and profession.

Unfamiliar cultural context

In the study, the researchers defined the term 'unfamiliar cultural context' in the sense of diversity in Indian culture, as there are 28 states and 9 union territories, and which are unique by their own language and cultural practices, where the individuals born and grown in their domicile

state/union territory and engaged as educational practitioner in outside of their native state or union territory. Factors affecting teacher effectiveness in an unfamiliar cultural context-

The study aimed to explore which factors most affect teacher effectiveness outside their home state in India, in a diverse cultural context. The study identified an area where the mother tongue, cultural background, and the state of residence of the school teachers differ from those of the students. Furthermore, all the students in this school take admission from their native district with a similar mother tongue and cultural background. The investigators reviewed prior studies on factors affecting the effectiveness of teachers working in migrant positions in diverse or unfamiliar cultural contexts.

In Goswami's (2015) study, it was reported that transferring to a school in an unfamiliar cultural region decreases teachers' effectiveness. In the context of a working situation, Bascia & Rottmann (2011) stated that the teacher's effectiveness, pleasure, and intrinsic drive should have the highest priority for the achievement of learners.

Literature review

Sadeghiet al. (2021) opined that most satisfied teachers were highly effective in teaching. Gupta & Verma (2021) recommended that, time-to-time, preserving societal status, the state of the relationship, commitment, and in-service training are compulsory for the most effective teachers. Cravens et al. (2021) concluded that collaborative teaching improves teachers' effectiveness and performance. Investigating the effectiveness of teachers with diverse cultural backgrounds, Gandhi (2020) found that teachers' mental state and specific cultural context-related abilities were urgently required for teaching in unfamiliar cultural settings. Nwani (2020) noted that truly understanding professional knowledge, instructional planning, praxis, variation in instruction, and self-assessment made teachers more effective and efficient in leading pupils towards successful learning. Coban et al. (2020) found that teacher effectiveness decreased when students' achievement was low, and in the same institution, another classroom showed a higher level of effectiveness. To know the effectiveness of teachers in relation to emotional intelligence, Soanes & Sungoh (2019) suggested that demographic variables, e.g., sex, experience, community, qualification, and locale, did not differ in the effectiveness of teachers, but in relation to emotional matters, the effectiveness of science faculty varies between female and male. Kumari & Chahal (2017) found that government school teachers were more effective than private school teachers, and that teachers with more than 10 years of teaching experience demonstrated higher levels of teacher effectiveness. According to Bashir (2017), teachers' commitment mostly depends on the content they teach. In suburban and urban areas, Jones (2017) found that openness and neuroticism were positively correlated with teacher effectiveness. Rani & Devi (2015) found that private school teachers were more effective than government school teachers, and that having more than 10 years of experience was associated with greater teaching effectiveness. Esfandiari & Nikoopour (2015) suggested that teaching experience and age significantly differ in teacher effectiveness. Kauts & Chechi (2014) found that government and private school teachers were equally effective, and that more experienced (more than 10 years) and highly emotionally balanced teachers were more effective. Studying teacher effectiveness, Pachaiyappan & Raj (2014) found that stream, scale of post, locale, and teaching experience significantly vary in teacher effectiveness among teachers. Mbuti & Orodho (2014) indicated that teacher effectiveness varies between expatriate and native teachers, and students preferred

the native teachers for a better understanding of the subject matter according to their needs. They concluded that the recruitment authority can prefer native teachers over expatriates.

To study teacher effectiveness in relation to demographic variables, Onyekuru & Ibegbunam (2013) argued that most teachers were less effective, and having more than 5 years of teaching experience indicates greater effectiveness. El-Hajji (2013) concluded that unwilling and problematic students are forcibly selected for migration. Here, migration policy is successfully practised, and students experience new food habits, a new lifestyle, unfamiliar communication language, and an unknown culture in the migrant school. Singh & Kumar (2012) revealed that, besides teaching, teachers also work with heavy workloads, e.g., caring for and controlling pupils outside the classroom, and assume strict responsibility in Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalayas. Sodhi (2010) found that teaching with a similar cultural background inspires teachers to a higher level of effectiveness; in contrast, an unfamiliar and close-knit school environment leads teachers to be less effective. To explore the factors of teacher effectiveness, Duckworth et al. (2009) found that grit and life satisfaction were substantial predictors of teacher effectiveness. Onderi & Croll (2009) found that personal and professional aspects of teachers and proper pedagogical practice.

Objectives of the study

O₁: To know the level of teacher effectiveness of migrated teachers in an unfamiliar cultural context.

O₂: To determine the difference in teacher effectiveness across different faculties (Language, Science, and Social Science) of migrated teachers in an unfamiliar cultural context.

O₃: To investigate whether demographic variables (e.g., sex, marital status, scale of post, stream, teaching experience in an unfamiliar cultural area) vary in teacher effectiveness in an unfamiliar cultural context.

O₄: To explore the relationship among the five different factors of teacher effectiveness in an unfamiliar cultural context.

O₅: To determine the relationship of the five different factors of teacher effectiveness with the aggregate effectiveness of migrated teachers in an unfamiliar cultural context.

O₆: To understand the prediction of the effectiveness of migrated teachers based on the five factors (e.g., preparation and planning for teaching, classroom management, knowledge of subject matter, etc., teacher characteristics, and interpersonal relations) of teacher effectiveness in an unfamiliar cultural context.

Hypotheses

H₀₁: There is no significant difference in teacher effectiveness across different faculties (language, science, and social science) of migrated teachers in an unfamiliar cultural context.

H₀₂: There is no significant difference in teacher effectiveness between male and female teachers in an unfamiliar cultural context.

H₀₃: There is no significant difference in teacher effectiveness between married and single teachers in an unfamiliar cultural context.

H₀₄: There is no significant difference in teacher effectiveness between trained graduate and postgraduate scale of migrated teachers in an unfamiliar cultural context.

H₀₅: There is no significant difference in teacher effectiveness between the arts and science streams of migrated teachers in an unfamiliar cultural context.

H₀₆: There is no significant difference in teacher effectiveness between less than five and greater than five years of teaching experience of migrated teachers in an unfamiliar cultural context.

H₀₇: There is no significant relationship among the five factors of teacher effectiveness of migrated teachers in an unfamiliar cultural context.

H₀₈: There is no significant relationship between the five factors of teacher effectiveness and the aggregate effectiveness of migrated teachers in an unfamiliar cultural context.

H₀₉: There are no significant predictors of the effectiveness of migrated teachers among the five factors of teacher effectiveness in an unfamiliar cultural context.

Research method

Procedure:

Population and Participants

The researcher utilized a descriptive survey research design for the study. The study population comprised all migrated teachers from 18 Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalayas (JNVs) in West Bengal, whose mother tongue was other than Bengali and who were residents of other states or union territories of India. A total of 127 teachers were recruited as participants for data collection via random sampling. Finally, 121 (37.19% female & 62.81% male) data were accepted out of 127 due to six responses that were not completed. The researcher conducted personal interviews with participants at all JNVs across the state of West Bengal. The researchers have obtained data-collection certificates from the principals/ICs of each JNV.

Consideration of research ethics

The research topic is duly authorised by the Board of Research Studies, Department of Education, The University of Burdwan. Then, the investigators have communicated through the proper channel to the concerned authority to conduct a survey of the Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalayas (JNVs). After obtaining permission from the school authority, one investigator met the participants in the JNVs and introduced the research to them. The teachers agreed to be participants. The investigators collected data from them.

Instrument

The researchers selected Kulsum's (2011) teacher effectiveness scale for the study. It is a standardised scale. The researchers conducted a pilot study to assess the scale's reliability just prior to the main study (Sarker et al., 2022). The pilot survey was conducted on 46 sample teachers from 16 Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalayas in the study population to confirm whether the scale is appropriate for the study. A construct measurement scale is administrable in an actual study if the alpha value is equal to or greater than .70 in the Cronbach Alpha test for reliability (Cronbach, 1951; Schmitt, 1996; Cortina, 1993; Bathgate et al., 2015; Taber, 2017). The researchers found that the Cronbach's Alpha was 0.997 for a scale of 60 items.

Table 1: Cronbach's Alpha Reliability of Kulsum (2011) Teacher Effectiveness Scale for Teacher

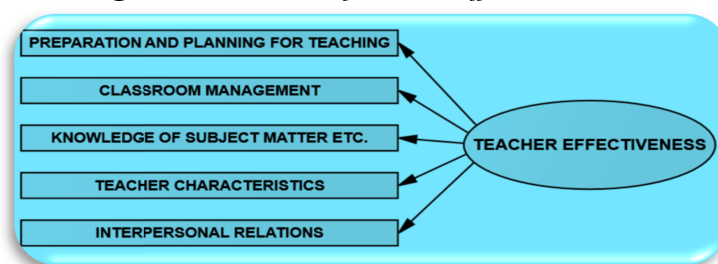
Serial No.	Area of the Scale	No. of items	Alpha Value	Internal Consistency
1	Preparation for teaching and planning	11	.987	Excellent
2	Classroom Management	14	.987	Excellent
3	Knowledge of Subject matters, etc.	7	.973	Excellent

4	Teacher Characteristics	17	.990	Excellent
5	Interpersonal Relations	11	.984	Excellent
6	Total Aggregate of the scale	60	.997	Excellent

Description of the scale

To assess teacher effectiveness, Kulsum (2010) developed and standardised the Teacher Effectiveness Scale for Teachers. This scale consisted of 60 items across five areas: preparation for teaching and planning (11 items), classroom management (14 items), knowledge of subject matter, etc. (7 items), teacher characteristics (17 items), and interpersonal relations (11 items). It is a self-administrable scale. There are the most and least effective, according to teachers' perceptions.

Figure 1: Five Areas of Teacher Effectiveness Scale



Scoring

On this scale, each item requires two types of responses, each with a 0-10 scale: the current step and the step one is aspiring to attain in the next three years. The time attribute for the next three years; the responses frame as a reference to the present effectiveness. The current score is taken as a measure of the teachers' effectiveness. The effectiveness score range is 0-600 (e.g., step 0 corresponds to a score of 0).

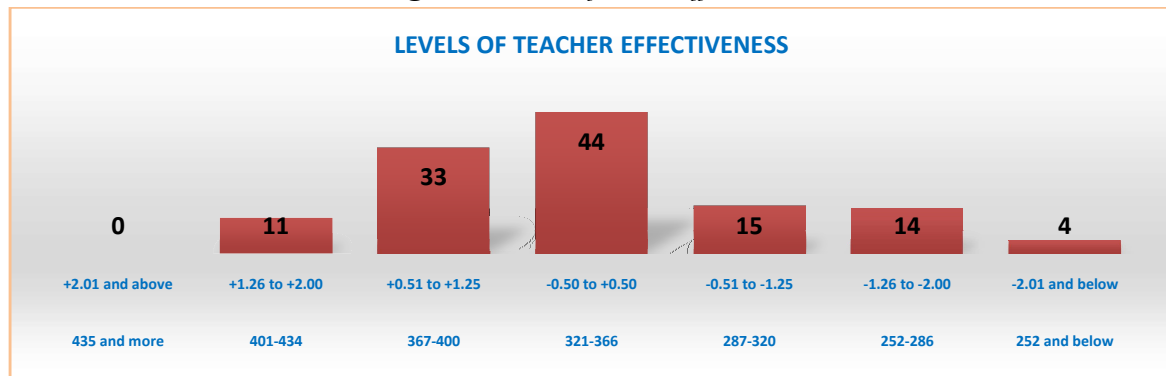
Table 2: Example of scoring of teacher effectiveness

Item	Step number you are now	Step number aspiring to attain in the next three years
I am fairly creative.	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Results

Table 3: Levels of teacher effectiveness (Kulsum, 2011).

Sl. No.	Range of Raw Scores	Range of z-Scores	Grade	Level of Teacher Effectiveness	Number of teachers	Percentages of teachers
1.	435 and more	+2.01 and above	A	Most Effective Teacher	0	0%
2.	401-434	+1.26 to +2.00	B	Highly Effective Teacher	11	9.090%
3.	367-400	+0.51 to +1.25	C	Above Average Effective Teacher	33	27.272%
4.	321-366	-0.50 to +0.50	D	Moderately Effective Teacher	44	36.363%
5.	287-320	-0.51 to -1.25	E	Below Average Effective Teacher	15	12.396%
6.	252-286	-1.26 to -2.00	F	Teacher	14	11.570%
7.	252 and below	-2.01 and below	G	Highly Ineffective Teacher Most Ineffective Teacher	4	3.305%

Figure 2: Levels of teacher effectiveness

The study aims to determine the level of effectiveness of migrated teachers in an unfamiliar cultural context. To assess teacher effectiveness, the investigator used descriptive statistics, converted the raw score to a z-score, and determined the level of effectiveness using Kulsum's (2011) teacher effectiveness level table. Here, shown in the table and diagram that 11 (9.090%) highly effective, 33 (27.272%) above average effective, 44 (36.363%) moderately effective, 15 (12.396%) below average effective, 14 (11.570%) highly ineffective, 4 (3.305%) most ineffective teachers. Most teachers fall into the moderately effective level.

H_{01} : There is no significant difference in teacher effectiveness across different faculties (language, science, and social science) of migrated teachers in an unfamiliar cultural context.

Table 4: Difference in Teacher Effectiveness across Different Faculties (N=121)

			Test of homogeneity of variance	ANOVA	
Faculties	Mean	Std. Deviation	Levene's Statistic	Sig.	F df Sig. BGWG
Language	531.07	55.34	2.229	.122	1.386
Science	511.02	73.72			2118
Social Science	510.88	56.71			.254
Group difference					
Faculties	Mean	Sig.	95% CI(LL -		
Language-Science	difference	.306	UL)		
Language-Social	20.19	.336	-12.25 - 52.63		
Science	20.05	1.00	-13.57- 53.67		
Social Science- Science	-.14		-32.53- 32.81		

To determine whether there is any difference in teacher effectiveness across different faculties (Language, Science, and Social Science). The researchers formulated a null hypothesis that the language, science, and social science faculties of migrated teachers do not differ significantly in teacher effectiveness. To test the null hypothesis, a one-way ANOVA was used. Table 4 shows that the ANOVA indicated no significant difference in teacher effectiveness scores across the different faculties ($F(2, 118) = 1.386, p > .05$).

Here, Levene's Statistic is not significant, and the equal variance is assumed. To assess individual differences between groups, the Tukey HSD test is used. The 39 participants of the

language faculty obtained the mean value of 531.07, SD=55.34; the 38 participants of the science faculty obtained the average score of 511.02, SD = 73.72; and the 44 participants of the social science faculty obtained the mean value of 510.88, SD = 56.71. The mean difference is not significantly different. Thus, the null hypothesis is not rejected.

H₀₂: There is no significant difference in teacher effectiveness between male and female migrated teachers in an unfamiliar cultural context.

Table 5: Difference in teacher effectiveness between male and female(N=121)

DV	IV		Mean	SD	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances				t-test for Equality of Means				
					F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% CI	
		N										LL	UL
Teacher Effectiveness	Male	81	516.16	65.57	1.853	.176	-.320	119	.750	-3.864	12.09	-27.81	20.08
	Female	40	520.02	55.94									

The study aims to know whether teacher effectiveness varies by gender among migrated teachers in an unfamiliar cultural context. The researchers formulated a null hypothesis that teacher effectiveness does not differ significantly between males and females. To test the null hypothesis, an independent-samples t-test is used. Table 3 shown, there is no significant difference($t(119) = -.320$, $p > 0.05$) in score of male ($M = 516.16$, $SD = 65.57$) and Female ($M = 520.02$, $SD = 55.94$). Despite female teachers' mean score being greater than male teachers', the degree of the difference in the mean score (mean difference = -3.86, 95% CI: -26.632 to 18.903) is not statistically significant. Thus, the null hypothesis is not rejected.

H₀₃: There is no significant difference in teacher effectiveness between married and single marital status of migrated teachers in an unfamiliar cultural context.

Table 6: Difference in teacher effectiveness between married and single (N=121)

DV	IV		Mean	SD	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances				t-test for Equality of Means				
					F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% CI	
		N										LL	UL
Teacher Effectiveness	Married	91	523.05	65.81	6.34	.013	2.046	84	.044	22.65	11.06	.576	44.73
	Single	30	500.40	47.39									

To identify whether teacher effectiveness differs by marital status among migrated teachers with unfamiliar cultural backgrounds, a null hypothesis is proposed: teacher effectiveness does not differ between married and single teachers. To test the null hypothesis, an independent-samples

t-test is used. Table 4 shows a significant difference ($t(68.64)=2.04$, $p<0.05$) in teacher effectiveness between married teachers ($M=523.05$, $SD=65.81$) and single teachers ($M=500.40$, $SD=47.39$). The extent of difference in mean score (mean difference = 22.65) and the 95% CI (.576 to 44.73) are statistically significant. So, the null hypothesis is not accepted.

H_{04} : There is no significant difference in teacher effectiveness between trained graduate and postgraduate scale of migrated teachers in an unfamiliar cultural context.

Table 7: *Difference in teacher effectiveness between trained graduate and postgraduate teachers (N=119).*

DV	IV		Mean	SD	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances				t-test for Equality of Means			
					F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% CI LL UL
Teacher Effectiveness	TGT	N										
		7	514.1	64.23	1.1	.29	.740119		.46	-8.65	11.69	- 14.50
	PGT	5	4		25	1			1			31.82 50
			522.8	59.45								
		4	0									
		6										

The investigators sought to determine whether the scale of post varies in teacher effectiveness among migrant teachers in an unfamiliar cultural context. To understand the difference, the investigators hypothesized, in null form, that teacher effectiveness does not vary significantly between trained graduate and postgraduate teachers. To test the null hypothesis, the investigators run an independent-samples t-test. Table 5 shows that there is no significant difference ($t(119)=.740$, $p>0.05$) in teacher effectiveness between the mean score of trained graduate ($M=514.14$, $SD=64.23$) and postgraduate teachers ($M=522.80$, $SD=59.45$). The mean difference (mean difference = -8.65) and 95% CI (-31.82 to 14.50) are not significant. Hence, the null hypothesis is not rejected.

H_{05} : There is no significant difference in teacher effectiveness between the arts and science streams of migrated teachers in an unfamiliar cultural context.

Table 8: *Difference in teacher effectiveness between arts and science stream teachers(N=119).*

DV	IV		Mean	SD	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances				t-test for Equality of Means			
					F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% CI LL UL
Teacher Effectiveness	Arts	N										
		7	521.1	65.41	1.3	.25	.873119		.384	10.29	11.79	- 33.65
	Science	7	8		15	4						13.05
			510.8	56.71								
		4	8									
		4										

The study aims to determine whether teacher effectiveness varies across streams among migrated teachers in an unfamiliar cultural context. To learn the difference, a null hypothesis has been constituted, that teacher effectiveness does not significantly vary between the arts and science streams. In this case, to test the null hypothesis, an independent sample t-test is performed.

Table 6 shows that there is no significant difference ($t(119) = 119, p > 0.05$) in teacher effectiveness between arts stream teachers ($M = 521.18, SD = 65.41$) and science stream teachers ($M = 510, SD = 56.71$). The degree of difference in mean scores (mean difference = 10.29; 95% CI: -13.05 to 33.65) is not significant. Accordingly, the null hypothesis is not rejected. H_{06} : There is no significant difference in teacher effectiveness between less than or equal to five years of teaching experience and greater than five years of teaching experience of migrated teachers in an unfamiliar cultural context.

Table 9: *Difference in Teacher Effectiveness Between Less Than or Equal and Greater Than Five Years of Teaching Experience (N-119)*

DV	IV	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances				t-test for Equality of Means						
		Mea	SD	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tail ed)	Mean Differ	Std. Error Differ	95% CI	
		N									LL	UL
Teacher Effectiveness	5 ≤ Years	79	513.31	60.35	1.763	-.997	119	.321	-11.87	11.90	-35.45	11.70
	5 > Years	42	525.19	65.98								

The study aimed to determine whether teacher effectiveness differs across levels of teaching experience among migrant teachers in an unfamiliar cultural context. To test the difference, a null hypothesis has been formulated: teacher effectiveness does not significantly differ between teachers with less than 5 years of teaching experience and those with more than 5 years of teaching experience. To test the null hypothesis, an independent-samples t-test was used. Table 7 shows that there is no significant difference ($t(119) = -.997, p > 0.05$) in teacher effectiveness between the average score of less than five years ($M = 513.31, SD = 60.35$) and greater than five years ($M = 525.19, SD = 65.98$) of teaching experience. The average score difference (mean difference = -11.87; 95% CI: -35.45 to 11.70) is not significant. Therefore, the null hypothesis is not rejected.

H_{07} : There is no significant relationship among the five factors of teacher effectiveness of migrated teachers in an unfamiliar cultural context.

Table 10: *Pearson Product-Moment Coefficient of Correlation among Five Factors of Teacher Effectiveness.*

Factors	1	2	3	4	5
1. Preparation for teaching and planning	1				
2. Classroom management	.941**	1			
3. Knowledge of subject matter, etc.	.923**	.925**	1		
4. Teacher characteristics	.937**	.943**	.929**	1	
5. Interpersonal relations	.923**	.942**	.917**	.945**	1

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The investigators want to explore the relationship among the five factors of teacher effectiveness. To identify the relationship among the five factors, the researchers formulated a null hypothesis stating that there is no significant relationship among them. To test the null hypothesis, the Pearson product-moment coefficient and correlation test have been applied. Table 10 shows that there is a very high level of correlation between preparation for teaching and planning with classroom management, $r(121) = .941$, $p < 0.01$, with knowledge of subject matter, etc., $r(121) = .923$, $p < 0.05$, with teacher characteristics, $r(121) = .937$, $p < 0.05$, with interpersonal relation $r(121) = .923$, $p < 0.05$. The correlation coefficients for the five factors are significant at the 0.01 level. Thus, the null hypothesis is not rejected.

H_{08} : There is no significant relationship between the five factors of teacher effectiveness and the aggregate effectiveness of migrated teachers in an unfamiliar cultural context.

Table 11: *Coefficient of Correlation of Five Factors on Teacher Effectiveness*

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Teacher effectiveness	1					
2. Preparation for teaching and planning	.970**	1				
3. Classroom management	.979**	.941**	1			
4. Knowledge of subject matter, etc.	.958**	.923**	.925**	1		
5. Teacher characteristics	.982**	.937**	.943**	.929**	1	
6. Interpersonal relations	.972**	.923**	.942**	.917**	.945**	1

Note: ** $p < .001$.

The investigators want to determine whether the five factors (e.g., preparation for teaching and planning, classroom management, knowledge of subject matter, teacher characteristics, and interpersonal relations) of teacher effectiveness are related to the aggregate effectiveness score of migrated teachers in an unfamiliar cultural context. To understand the relationship, a null hypothesis has been formulated, positing that the five factors are not significantly correlated with the aggregate effectiveness of migrated teachers. A multiple linear correlation test has been applied to test the null hypothesis and found a significant positive correlation. The results indicate that aggregate effectiveness of migrated teachers positively and perfectly correlated with each five factors e.g., correlation with preparation for teaching & planning ($r(121) = .970$, $p < .001$), correlation with classroom management ($r(121) = .979$, $p < .001$), correlation with knowledge of subject matters etc ($r(121) = .958$, $p < .001$), correlation with teacher character ($r(121) = .982$, $p < .001$), and correlation with interpersonal relation ($r(121) = .972$, $p < .001$). Thus, the null hypothesis is not accepted.

H_{09} : There are no significant predictors of the effectiveness of migrated teachers among the five factors of teacher effectiveness in an unfamiliar cultural context.

Table 12: *Regression Coefficient of Five Factors on Teacher Effectiveness*

Variable	B	SE	t	p	95% CI
Constant	2.84	.00	.	.	[.00-.00]
Preparation and Planning for Teaching	1.00	.00	.	.	[1.00-1.00]
Classroom Management	1.00	.00	.	.	[1.00-1.00]
Knowledge of Subject Matters, etc.	1.00	.00	.	.	[1.00-1.00]
Teacher Characteristics	1.00	.00	.	.	[1.00-1.00]
Interpersonal Relation	1.00	.00	.	.	[1.00-1.00]

Note. CI = Confidence interval.

Table 13: Model Summary for Regression

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.982a	.963	.963	11.9822	.963	3130.220	1	119	.000
2	.995b	.989	.989	6.4675	.026	290.460	1	118	.000
3	.997c	.995	.995	4.4870	.006	128.157	1	117	.000
4	.999d	.999	.998	2.4321	.004	282.222	1	116	.000
5	1.000e	1.000	1.000	.0000	.001	.	1	115	.

Note. a. Predictors: (Constant), Teacher characteristics, b. Predictors: (Constant), Teacher characteristics, Classroom management, c. Predictors: (Constant), Teacher characteristics, classroom management, Preparation for teaching and planning, d. Predictors: (Constant), Teacher characteristics, Classroom management, Preparation for teaching and planning, Interpersonal relations, e. Predictors: (Constant), Teacher Characteristics, Classroom management, Preparation for teaching and planning, Interpersonal relations, Knowledge of subject matters etc., f. Dependent Variable: Teacher effectiveness.

The goal of the study is to predict the effectiveness of migrated teachers given the five factors of teacher effectiveness in an unfamiliar cultural context. For that, a null hypothesis is framed to understand the prediction of each factor and hypothesized that the five factors of teacher effectiveness do not significantly predict the effectiveness of migrated teachers. To test the null hypothesis, a multiple linear regression analysis is calculated for understanding the prediction of effectiveness by the five factors, e.g., preparation and planning for teaching, classroom management, knowledge of subject matter, etc., teacher characteristics, and interpersonal relations.

Table 11 shows the effect of five factors of teacher effectiveness on the effectiveness of migrated teachers in an unfamiliar cultural context. The multiple linear regression analysis yields a significant regression equation ($R^2 = 1.00$), indicating that 100% of the variation in teacher effectiveness is explained by all five factors, each of which perfectly predicts teacher effectiveness. The regression model is a perfect fit. All the effectiveness falls perfectly on the regression line, and all five predictors account for all the variance in the aggregate effectiveness score.

Table 12 shows that, individually, knowledge of subject matter and related factors are the best predictors of teacher effectiveness ($R^2 = 1.00$). Thus, the null hypothesis is not accepted.

Discussion and exploration

The researcher studied teacher effectiveness using different demographic variables and five factors. The results indicate that demographic variables, except marital status, have no effect on teacher effectiveness, and the five factors showed equal relationships with effectiveness and perfectly predicted it in the total obtained score. Knowledge of subject matters, etc, is the best predictor of the effectiveness of migrated teachers in an unfamiliar cultural context. Duckworth et al. (2009) argued that demographic variables focused least on differences in teacher effectiveness and other factors, e.g., school-related factors, which vary substantially in their effects on teacher effectiveness (Darling-Hammond & Berry, 2006). The effectiveness of

migrated teachers is unequally distributed, with less than average effectiveness, and it is going down, with their effectiveness decreasing dramatically day by day due to overwhelming workloads. Marital status is a significant factor for healthy living in a residential setup of a school, and loneliness affects the teachers, while it matters for domestic and psychosocial imbalance (Odanga et al., 2015).

The study shows that teachers are becoming moderately effective (36.36%), below average effective, including worst effective (27.26%), and 27.27% of the teachers fall under above average effective. The total, 90.90% of good-quality teachers in JNVs (Claimed by NVS), reported an unfavorable classroom environment for implementing their instructional transactions in a highly effective way due to students' unfamiliar cultural context. Investigators concluded that the unfamiliar cultural background is the leading cause of its less effectiveness. Goswami (2015) suggested that, despite being highly effective, teachers who move to a different geographical area are ineffective in teaching. Similarly, Mbuthi & Orodho, 2014; Ronfeld et al., 2013; & Sodhy, 2010, and different cultural, ethnic background, socioeconomic status of students, urban and suburban setup of school differ in effectiveness of highly qualified teachers (Jones, 2017; Long, 2012; Kane et al., 2011; Jacob, 2007; Akiba et al., 2007; Nye et al., 2004). The result of the study is in tune with the previous study.

The investigators concluded that the primary purpose of the study was to determine whether, in unfamiliar cultural contexts or changes in the school environment, the effectiveness of migrated teachers was equally influenced by changes in the five factors of teacher effectiveness. Changes in the teaching environment affect teacher preparation for teaching and planning, personal character, relationships with others, classroom management in an unfamiliar cultural context, and knowledge of subject matter, among other things. However, these remain unchanged in their contribution to teacher effectiveness. So, among the five factors, knowledge of subject matter, etc., is the best-predicting factor ($R^2 = 1$).

Teachers are engaged in teaching activities; each factor contributed equally to changes in the effectiveness of migrated teachers, and demographic variables also did not affect their effectiveness. Teacher effectiveness can be increased by nurturing the five factors, as they perfectly predict effectiveness in a linear regression model. As previous studies (Duckworth et al., 2009) demonstrated, demographic variables do not affect effectiveness. According to the evidence, the effectiveness of migrated teachers varies in an unfamiliar cultural context. It is demonstrated that the teachers practise all their teaching activities and their related matters in parallel, which underlie the five factors of teacher effectiveness. It means they are concerned about their daily activities and try to put forth their best effort, but the unfamiliarity with the students' cultural background or the unknown cultural background of the students creates an invisible barrier to the full impact of the teachers.

Delimitations, limitations, and future research

The study has been completed with many delimitations and limitations. The study includes only 18 Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalayas (JNVs) in West Bengal, India. The participants are only migrated Indian teachers in JNVs. The study used a standard scale. The study employed teachers only. In the Indian context, limited research has been conducted. Thus, a limited number of literature has been included for review in the study. The study includes the principals only for comparing teacher effectiveness. It can include students to improve the accuracy of the results. In further study, the population can include another schooling system in the entire state

of West Bengal. A comparative study can be conducted with migrated and native teachers. Students' achievement can be included to explore the factors of effectiveness in a broad sense.

Conclusion

The study measures the effectiveness of migrated teachers in exploring the factors affecting teachers in unfamiliar cultural settings. Teachers' knowledge of subject matter does not vary across cultures, but other factors do. The result revealed that heterogeneity in culture, ethnicity, language, and socioeconomic environment between students and teachers varies across JNVs in West Bengal, affecting teacher effectiveness. Furthermore, the life-changing influence of teachers occurs when they enjoy liberty and are engaged solely in teaching activities, with no additional workloads. The study suggests that effectiveness may vary across familiar and unfamiliar cultural settings, and that average effective teachers can be highly effective in their own cultural setting. The literature suggests that the effectiveness of highly effective teachers decreases due to changes in the school environment. Effectiveness can be increased by minimizing the effects of factors related to teacher effectiveness across cultures. The study recommends that training and knowledge of Indian culture are urgent needs for migrated teachers.

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Exploring Teacher Preparedness for Digital Teaching from Chalk Board

Sunita Kejriwal, PhD
Assistant Professor
Department of Education
Maharani Kasiswari College
University of Calcutta
West Bengal, India
goldeneyesunita@gmail.com

Bipasha Sinha, PhD
Associate Professor
Department of Education
Seth Soorajmull Jalan Girls' College
University of Calcutta
West Bengal, India
bipashasinha@gmail.com

Abstract

The rapid integration of digital technology into education has necessitated a significant shift in teaching methodologies, particularly for educators accustomed to traditional chalkboard-based instruction. This study explores teacher preparedness for digital teaching, focusing on the transition from conventional methods to modern digital platforms. Using a mixed-methods approach, the research draws on survey data from 150 teachers of five colleges in Kolkata. The findings of the study reveal that while many educators recognize the benefits of digital teaching, disparities in training, age of educators, mindset, infrastructure, and confidence levels hinder effective implementation. The study underscores the need for targeted capacity-building programs and policy support to bridge the digital divide and facilitate smooth instructional methods for the transition from lectures. The insights gained contribute to understanding the challenges and opportunities in equipping teachers for a technology-enhanced educational environment.



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Keywords: Digital divide, Teacher preparedness, Mindset.

Introduction

In the present scenario, education has undergone a remarkable transformation in the teaching–learning process. As educational systems worldwide increasingly integrate technology, the role of teachers is evolving from traditional instructors to digital facilitators. The paradigm shift from traditional chalk-and-talk methods to digitally enabled classrooms has transformed the entire educational landscape. With the rise of e-learning platforms, virtual assessments, and blended learning models, teachers are expected to be digitally competent and pedagogically adaptive. This transformation, however, poses a critical question of whether teachers are truly prepared for this digital leap. Nevertheless, the accelerated shift to online learning has posed significant difficulties for teachers, school leaders, parents, and students of all ages, most of whom were accustomed to traditional in-person education and lacked experience with virtual teaching and learning environments (Burgin, Coli & Daniel, 2022; Jelinska & Paradowski, 2021).

According to the International Telecommunication Union's (ITU) facts and figures 2024 report, young people are more likely to use the Internet, but the gap is rapidly diminishing. Worldwide, an estimated 79% of people aged 15 to 24 use the Internet, which is 13 percent higher than the general population. This generational gap, observed in every region, has been slowly shrinking over the last four years. The modification in the educator's professional life highlights that the professional landscape for teachers has shifted, requiring them to be more adaptive, tech-savvy, and student-engaging than ever before. (Cardullo et al., 2021; Miller, 2021).

The rapid transformation of global education has fundamentally reshaped the entire teaching and learning experience, moving from traditional chalk-and-board classrooms to technology-enabled digital environments. In the post-pandemic world, digital literacy is no longer an optional skill but a core professional competency for teachers. Globally, educational systems are emphasizing digital pedagogy, virtual learning platforms, ICT-integrated curricula, and blended learning models. Countries across Europe, North America, and East Asia have invested substantially in digital training of teachers along with pedagogical innovations, making digital teaching an essential component of modern education. As a result, teacher preparedness for digital teaching has become a critical determinant of instructional quality, student engagement, and overall learning outcomes. Across the world, education systems are undergoing a profound transformation from traditional chalkboard-based instruction to digital and technology-enhanced pedagogy. Teachers' readiness to integrate ICT, digital content, and virtual learning tools has emerged as a key indicator of the effectiveness of modern education.

Different global regions have progressed at varying levels, shaped by economic capacity, technological infrastructure, policy frameworks, and cultural priorities. The U.S. is one of the global leaders in adopting digital teaching. Schools and universities widely use learning management systems, digital textbooks, AI-based assessment tools, and blended learning models. Teacher preparedness is strengthened through continuous professional development, federal technology grants, and district-level ICT standards. During and after the pandemic, the U.S. invested heavily in virtual schooling, enabling teachers to gain extensive experience in remote and hybrid teaching. The American system emphasizes teacher autonomy, technological innovation, and experimentation, making teachers relatively well-prepared for digital pedagogy, and blends traditional teaching culture with advanced technology. Although Japanese classrooms have historically been chalk-and-talk oriented, recent initiatives under the “GIGA School

Program” have significantly expanded digital access. Every student is receiving a digital device, and schools are adopting high-speed networks, which have motivated teachers to develop ICT competencies.

In India, the shift towards digitization in education has accelerated dramatically, especially since the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted systemic inadequacies in access to technology, teacher training, and digital pedagogical skills. India’s diverse education system, spanning from rural to urban, government to private institutions, faces wide variations in digital readiness. National initiatives such as DIKSHA, SWAYAM, NEP 2020, and the PM e-Vidya Programme emphasize building teacher competence in ICT, digital content creation, online assessments, and blended learning methodologies. Despite these efforts, many teachers continue to struggle with inadequate digital infrastructure, limited exposure to ICT, and insufficient professional competency. The transition from chalkboard-based instruction to digital teaching thus remains uneven and challenging across the country.

In West Bengal, the shift to digital teaching has been shaped by regional realities, including infrastructure constraints, socio-economic diversity, linguistic variation, and technological accessibility. While several colleges and schools in urban cities like Kolkata have adopted digital tools, many institutions in semi-urban and rural districts still depend heavily on traditional methods. The state government’s initiatives, such as digital classrooms, ICT labs, and teacher training programmes, have created momentum, yet gaps in teacher preparedness persist. Teachers often face challenges related to the availability of digital resources, training opportunities, and institutional support, which influence their confidence and ability to integrate ICT meaningfully into pedagogy. As West Bengal moves towards a blended, technology-enabled educational future, understanding the level of teacher preparedness becomes essential for designing effective policies and ensuring equitable learning. Overall, exploring teacher preparedness for digital teaching is crucial not only for understanding current capabilities but also for identifying the challenges and support systems required during this transition from chalkboard-based instruction to digital pedagogy. This study contributes to the growing discourse on digital education by analysing teachers’ readiness, barriers, and experiences across different contexts, from the global landscape to India and specifically West Bengal.

Literature Review

Starkey (2018) provided insight into what has and has not been studied across a range of literature and the alignment with the broader context of digital integration in schools. Panda (2019) had shown that high-quality teachers are essential for the future growth of national educational systems and economic vitality. Santoro et al. (2012) revealed that the deteriorating quality of education in the country prompted policymakers and researchers to investigate the possible reasons for the decline in student achievement. Juanda et al. (2021) found that implementing an online learning system requires teachers to integrate educational technology into lesson preparation, selecting teaching strategies, designing learning assessment and evaluation, and improving class management. Jeschke, Knipping, and Pfeiffer (2014) found that e-Chalk was beneficial and usable for teaching, preserving the advantages of traditional chalkboards while extending their reach to multimedia and remote learning. Gepila Jr. (2020) found that the efficient use of technology in lesson delivery signified the success of the teaching

and learning process. Teacher preparation has been regarded as a paradoxical panacea for improving school curricula and teaching and learning, while at the same time being subject to critiques that question its efficacy in training high-quality teachers for the 21st century (Flores, 2016). A substantial body of research underscores the importance of teacher readiness for successfully integrating technology into the classroom (Ertmer & Ottenbreit-Leftwich, 2010). The TPACK model (Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge) is frequently used to assess how effectively teachers integrate technological proficiency with instructional strategies and subject-matter expertise. However, even with the implementation of national ICT initiatives and professional development efforts, many teachers, especially those in less developed regions, continue to face challenges due to inadequate infrastructure and a lack of digital skills (UNESCO, 2022). In a review of literature on developing and assessing (Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge) TPACK-ready teachers, Chrystalla Mouza (2016) concluded that there is little research on the effective preparation of pre-service teachers. The literature review identifies key shortcomings, including inadequate in-service training, technological angst or aversion to change, and limited access to current digital tools and internet connectivity.

Methodology

A mixed-method research approach was employed in this study, integrating both qualitative and quantitative techniques to gain a comprehensive understanding of the research problem. Purposive sampling was utilized to select colleges located in Kolkata, ensuring that the institutions chosen were relevant to the research objectives. The criteria for participant selection required that teachers possess a minimum of five to six years of teaching experience and demonstrate competence in Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK). A total of 150 college teachers participated in the study. The sample included a diverse group of educators, including PhD holders, non-PhD holders, and guest educators, providing a broad perspective on the teaching landscape in higher education institutions in Kolkata.

- **Quantitative survey** of 150 teachers from 5 Kolkata colleges

Table 1: *Questionnaire items with response values*

Variable Name	Description	Values / Coding
Q1	Struggle with online teaching	1 = Never, 2 = Rarely, 3 = Sometimes, 4 = Frequently, 5 = Always
Q2	Difficulty selecting software	Same coding as above
Q3	Struggle using meeting platforms	1 = Never, 2 = Rarely, 3 = Sometimes, 4 = Frequently
Q4	Difficulty preparing LMS/PPT	1 = Initially, 2 = Sometimes, 3 = Always
Q5	Difficulty managing blended routine	1 = Never, 2 = Sometimes, 3 = Often
Q6	Difficulty using tech in evaluation	1 = Sometimes, 2 = Always
Q7	Digital literacy in college days	1 = Yes, 2 = No
Q8	Difficulty incorporating online materials	1 = Initially, 2 = Sometimes, 3 = Always
Q9	Institutional support availability	1 = Yes, 2 = No
Q10	Difficulty completing syllabus	1 = Never, 2 = Sometimes, 3 = Always

- **Qualitative interviews** with 30 teachers, 6 teachers each from 5 colleges.

Table 2: *Nature of sample*

S. No.	Gender	Age Group 30–50	Age Group Above 50	Total Participants
1	Male	38	37	75
2	Female	37	38	75
—	Total	75	75	150

This study examined teacher preparedness and technological proficiency in implementing digital and blended teaching methods across two age groups: **30–50 years** and **50+ years**. Using qualitative interviews supported by open-ended and probing questions, the study explored teachers' experiences with ICT tools, software selection, online platforms, digital assessment, content creation, and institutional support.

Result

Table 3: *Frequency distribution of responses of 150 teachers from 5 colleges*

S.No	Questionnaire Item	Age 30–50 (n=75)	Age 50+ (n=75)
1	Struggling in implementing the online teaching–learning process and ICT	Rarely – 55 Sometimes – 20	Frequently – 60 Sometimes – 15
2	Challenging to choose software & low confidence in implementation	Sometimes – 45 Rarely – 30	Always – 55 Sometimes – 20
3	Struggling to use Google Meet, Zoom, MS Teams	Never – 50 Rarely – 25	Rarely – 45 Sometimes – 30
4	Difficulty in preparing LMS & using PPT for illustrations	Initially – 60 Sometimes – 15	Sometimes – 50 Initially – 25
5	Struggling to manage a blended routine	Never – 75	Never – 75
6	Difficulty using technology in evaluation and assessment	Sometimes – 50 Rarely – 25	Always – 55 Sometimes – 20
7	Digital literacy during college days	Yes – 65 No – 10	Yes– 10 No – 65
8	Difficulty incorporating online materials in teaching	Initially – 55 Sometimes – 20	Always – 60 Sometimes – 15
9	Limited support by the institution	Yes – 48 No – 27	Yes– 52 No – 23
10	Struggling to complete the syllabus on time in the semester system	Sometimes – 55 Rarely – 20	Sometimes – 52 Rarely – 23

The overall responses indicate that younger teachers in the 30–50 age group demonstrate stronger digital competence, as most reported. Only some reported rare or occasional difficulty with ICT tools, reflecting better adaptability and prior exposure to digital platforms. In contrast, teachers aged 50 and above frequently faced ICT-related challenges, consistently selecting responses such as “Frequently” or “Always,” suggesting ongoing difficulties in selecting appropriate software, implementing ICT, and integrating online materials. Despite these differences, both age groups managed blended learning effectively, with almost all respondents indicating that they “Never” struggled with blended routines, suggesting that mixed-mode teaching has become a normalized practice. However, older teachers continue to struggle significantly with digital platforms such as Google Meet, Zoom, and Microsoft Teams, highlighting a clear digital learning gap. This generational divide is further emphasized by

responses on digital literacy during college days: the majority of younger teachers reported being digitally literate, while the 50+ group overwhelmingly reported a lack of such exposure. The use of technology during evaluation also remains a major difficulty for both groups, particularly for older teachers, who struggle with digital assessments and online evaluation tools. Across all groups, institutional support was perceived as limited, reflecting a need for improved training, technical assistance, and ICT infrastructure. Additionally, completing the syllabus within the semester timeframe remains a common challenge for teachers of both age brackets, with many selecting “Sometimes,” indicating that ICT-related tasks and time constraints put pressure on timely syllabus completion.

TABLE 4: *Male Female response distribution table*

S.No	Questionnaire Item	Male 30–50 (n=38)	Male 50+ (n=37)	Female 30–50 (n=37)	Female 50+ (n=38)
1	Struggling with implementing online ICT	Rarely – 28 Sometimes – 10	Frequently – 30 Sometimes – 7	Rarely – 27 Sometimes – 10	Frequently – 30 Sometimes – 8
2	Choosing software & confidence issue	Sometimes – 23 Rarely – 15	Always – 28 Sometimes – 9	Sometimes – 22 Rarely – 15	Always – 27 Sometimes – 11
3	Using Meet/Zoom/Teams	Never – 25 Rarely – 13	Rarely – 22 Sometimes – 15	Never – 25 Rarely – 12	Rarely – 23 Sometimes – 15
4	LMS & PPT preparation	Initially – 30 Sometimes – 8	Sometimes – 24 Initially – 13	Initially – 30 Sometimes – 7	Sometimes – 26 Initially – 12
5	Managing blended routine	Never – 38	Never – 37	Never – 37	Never – 38
6	Tech use in evaluation	Sometimes – 25 Rarely – 13	Always – 27 Sometimes – 10	Sometimes – 25 Rarely – 12	Always – 28 Sometimes – 10
7	Digital literacy in college	Yes – 33 No – 5	Yes – 6 No – 31	Yes – 32 No – 5	Yes – 4 No – 34
8	Incorporating online material	Initially – 28 Sometimes – 10	Always – 30 Sometimes – 7	Initially – 27 Sometimes – 10	Always – 30 Sometimes – 8
9	Institutional support	Yes – 25 No – 13	Yes – 26 No – 11	Yes – 23 No – 14	Yes – 26 No – 12
10	Completing the syllabus in time	Sometimes – 28 Rarely – 10	Sometimes – 26 Rarely – 11	Sometimes – 27 Rarely – 10	Sometimes – 26 Rarely – 12

The findings indicate a clear generational gap. Teachers aged 30–50 demonstrated higher adaptability, confidence, and familiarity with digital tools, often struggling only initially. In contrast, teachers aged 50 and above consistently reported difficulties in using software, conducting online evaluations, creating LMS materials, and integrating online resources. Both groups, however, agreed that institutional support for digital teaching was limited and that completing the syllabus within the semester system was challenging.

Table 5: Distribution of qualitative sample

S. No.	College	Number of Teachers Interviewed
1	College 1	6(4 males, 2 females)
2	College 2	6(3 females, 3 males)
3	College 3	6(3 females, 3 males)
4	College 4	6(4 males, 2 females)
5	College 5	6(3 males, 3 females)
—	Total	30

A qualitative study was conducted with **30 teachers**, equally distributed across five **colleges**, with **six participants from each institution**. The purpose of this phase was to gain an in-depth understanding of teachers' lived experiences, professional challenges, and perceived gaps in the use of digital tools and ICT in the teaching–learning process. The interviews revealed several recurring themes. Many teachers reported experiencing technical difficulties, including unreliable internet, insufficient institutional support, and limited access to updated devices. Teachers from both age groups (30–50 and above 50) expressed concerns about inadequate training and the absence of systematic professional development on ICT integration. Senior teachers (50+) particularly highlighted discomfort with rapidly changing technology and felt the need for more continuous, hands-on in-service guidance. Participants also pointed out loopholes at the institutional and systemic level, including inconsistency in policy implementation, lack of time for learning new tools, and minimal collaboration and sharing opportunities via college clusters. Despite these challenges, teachers emphasized their willingness to improve and recognised ICT as an essential tool for enhancing student engagement, blended learning, and innovative pedagogy.

Overall, the qualitative findings complement the quantitative results by highlighting the depth, context, and emotional dimensions behind teachers' struggles and suggestions for improvement.

Findings and Discussions

After summarising the questionnaire, it was found that the teachers have reached the stage of using ICT in education, but some teachers are using PPT presentations in the explanation of topics, and evaluation and assessment in older methods. Some teachers have knowledge of ICT and are digitally savvy during college days, but are still not interested due to poor Wi-Fi connectivity and time constraints for completing the syllabus. Generally, young-generation teachers are digital citizens, but are not prepared to teach students using technology due to limited institutional support. Teachers appointed before 2000 are not confident in using technology in instruction and struggle to conduct classes on Google Meet, Zoom, and other online platforms.

The analysis of responses from 150 teachers reveals a clear generational divide in digital competence and confidence in implementing ICT-based teaching. Teachers in the 30–50 age group demonstrated comparatively greater adaptability, reporting fewer difficulties with using online platforms, preparing digital learning materials, and integrating technology into classroom practices. In contrast, teachers aged 50 and above frequently encountered challenges across most ICT-related tasks, including software selection, use of virtual platforms, and digital evaluation

processes, largely due to limited digital exposure during their formative years. Despite this gap, both age groups reported comfort with managing blended learning routines, indicating that hybrid teaching has become a familiar practice. The findings also highlight insufficient institutional support, as a majority of teachers across genders and age groups perceived inadequate training and technical assistance. Additionally, completing the syllabus within the semester timeline remains a moderate concern for all respondents, reflecting the additional time required for digital preparation and content delivery. Overall, the responses suggest a need for targeted digital training programs, capacity-building initiatives, and institutional strengthening to ensure effective and equitable integration of ICT in teaching–learning processes.

Conclusion

Teacher preparedness and technological proficiency are essential for the successful implementation of digital classes. While frameworks like Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) support this integration, many educators still face challenges due to limited training, infrastructure, and digital literacy, particularly in under-resourced areas. Strengthening professional development and ensuring equitable access to technology are key components to bridge this gap. The journey from chalkboard to digital classroom is not merely technological; it is cultural, pedagogical, and institutional. While there is a growing willingness among educators to embrace change, true transformation demands sustained investment in capacity-building, supportive leadership, and inclusive policy frameworks. Preparedness is not an endpoint, but a continuous process of evolution and adaptation is the future goal.

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A Study on the Educational Thought of Jiddu Krishnamurti

Moumita Patra

Assistant Professor

B.Ed. Department,

University B.T. & Evening College

Cooch Behar, West Bengal, India

Email: peeu1987@gmail.com

Abstract:

This paper aims to analyze the essential nature of philosophy and the educational philosophy of Jiddu Krishnamurti. He believed that the mind, once suppressed, never acquires awareness, and that education is the foundation stone of life. Therefore, education is essential as it develops the mind without fear. To produce a holistic personality, Jiddu Krishnamurti recommended an integrated curriculum and teaching strategies. He was opposed to rote learning and the formal system of education. This study aims to explore the philosophy of life of Jiddu Krishnamurti through an in-depth examination of his educational philosophy.



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Introduction

Holistic education is incomplete without philosophical insight. On the other side, philosophy will never attain fulfillment without education. It is evident that all the great philosophers are also great educationists. An individual's educational pursuit is marked by their philosophy. Education is such a deliberate course of action that makes numerous tasks relevant to the times. Philosophy and education thus harmonize with each other. In the context of time, different perspectives became visible. Philosophical considerations put on hold. As a result, significant changes occurred in the field of education, and it became an obvious fact that education could not meet social aspirations. Whenever human society confronts critical difficulties, philosophy reaches out to help. The twentieth century witnessed significant changes in educational thought.

Jiddu Krishnamurti (1895-1986) was a profound thinker, learned scholar, spiritual orator, and a great philosopher of the twentieth century. He was best known for his school of thought, alternative education. Though he possessed no conventional educational qualifications, he became known as a prominent critic of the formal system of schooling and rigorous practices. Opposed to the prevailing educational framework and its consequences, he presented an unconventional perspective on education, namely 'Right Education'. The latest National Educational Policy (NEP), 2020, has followed his vision as the most relevant philosophy in the 21st century.

Objectives of the Study

This study seeks to explore the philosophy of life of Jiddu Krishnamurti and to examine his educational philosophy.

Philosophy of Life

Krishnamurti is truly a free thinker; therefore, he refused to fit himself into any belief, creed, or system, or to become a system himself. He proposed that nothing more than a total transformation of the individual self could cure conflict and suffering worldwide. His message to humanity was, 'first understand the purpose of our existence, the purpose of our life, and understand what we were thriving for. Then utilize everything to strengthen us. To find out what you really love to do is one of the most difficult things. That is part of education.' His teaching is his ideas on truth, mind, thought, intelligence, attention, perception, freedom, love, and self.

Research Methodology

Here, the content analysis procedure has been used to meet the objectives. The books of Krishnamurti, his official websites, and various journals on Krishnamurti serve as primary and secondary sources.

Krishnamurti's Philosophy of Education

An individual has to practice his /her own ideas through the medium of education. By doing so, each and every philosopher has made their thoughts and ideals alive. Jiddu Krishnamurti shared

the same ideals and trod the same path. Through his experiments, he presented his thoughts in a certain form. Krishnamurti rejected the existing form of education and introduced his educational philosophy, 'Right Education'. Krishnamurti's concept of 'Right Education' encompasses -

- Right Functions of Education
- Right environment
- Right School
- Right Curriculum
- Right Method of Teaching
- Right Teacher

The books that portray his ideals include '*Education and Significance of Life*', '*On Education*', '*Life Ahead*', and '*Letters to the School*' (Vol. 1 & Vol. 2).

Education according to J. Krishnamurti

Krishnamurti has critically analysed the present education system and found structural weaknesses in its aims, purpose, teaching strategy, and curriculum. He declined the contemporary education system, as it does not emphasize the human factor but instead relies on rigid techniques. He mentioned that this system is characterised by rote learning and information-based examinations. It failed to develop the cognitive domain specifically; understanding, application, and analysis-based attitudes could not be developed among learners. Mind cultivation is largely missed. Jiddu Krishnamurti instituted several schools where his educational philosophy is nurtured. These are Rishi Valley School, Rajghat Besant School, and Brockwood Park School. These schools foster freedom, self-awareness, holistic development, and application-based knowledge.

Aim of Education

Krishnamurti was strongly opposed to knowledge-based education, as it primarily deals with facts and information. This kind of education can never be transformative. The significance of life lies in the search for truth as a whole. In 'Jiddu Krishnamurti and His Insights into Education', Scott Forbes mentioned that the aims of education :

- Educating the whole person (all parts of the person)
- Educating the person as a whole (not as an assemblage of parts)
- Educating the person within the whole (as part of society).

Curriculum and Ideas of a School

Krishnamurti recommended an integrated curriculum. He believes that holistic development is an essential criterion. As he was an eco-conscious person, he always considered environmental studies a compulsory subject. Various other activities were also offered during the course of study, such as art and craft, yoga, performing arts, and debate. Krishnamurti never supported an examination-centric curriculum, as it is a teacher-centric approach to learning. It attains the intellectual and professional goal. The social, moral, aesthetic, physical, and spiritual dimensions

are never attained. Therefore, he refused such a peripheral course of study. Krishnamurti prioritized an experience- and activity-based curriculum through which learners adopt the principle of living in harmony. Because of this, Krishnamurti advocated the 'Art of Listening'.

Regarding school, Krishnamurti set certain criteria. He used to believe that a school should provide a home-like environment where learners can act without hesitation. The school structure will never make pupils feel frightened or force them to follow inflexible rules and regulations. Krishnamurti (1979) believes that "If the student is not happy, he is incapable of learning this art." He characterised the school as a place where one can learn as a whole, not in a partial manner. It is obvious that scholarly achievement is much needed, but a school should be larger than this type of confinement. Here, the teacher and learners set out on their journey to quench their thirst for knowledge. This quest for search will shape their thinking as well as their behaviour (Krishnamurti, 1984).

Teacher

The child's potential is largely shaped by their teachers. So the role of a teacher is non-negotiable. They should keep the learners away from the competitive world. This rat race raises competitive spirit, destroying their creativity, originality, and critical thinking. The first and foremost duty of a teacher is to guide learners to cultivate a pure soul and a conscious mind that seeks to explore truth, and to invest their energy in exploring the world of knowledge and life. Such a discipline motivates them to face the challenges encountered throughout life. They never practice the escapist route.

Method of Teaching

For Krishnamurti, following a set of teaching methods is unacceptable because it is usually repeated, creating monotony in the classroom. He supported insightful and discovery learning. He asserted that the purpose of life is to know oneself. This process of searching encourages one to step forward toward true knowledge. He assured that conventional methods such as lectures, demonstrations, and projects can be applied, but only for the presentation of surface-level knowledge. While shaping the psychological foundation, a broad perspective and a neutral stance are highly valued and expected from teachers and guides.

Discipline

Krishnamurti was not in favour of harsh discipline. It seems to him to be a conformity. Because he assumes that strict discipline produces obedience without reverence. Krishnamurti prefers order in place of discipline. According to him, "discipline means to learn, not to conform, not to suppress, not to imitate the pattern ... in it are involved several things: to learn, to be austere, to be free, to be sensitive, and to see the beauty of love ... discipline is freedom" (Krishnamurti, 1970). Krishnamurti continues to say, "If you are considerate, if you are watching, if you are listening, then, because you are free, you will be punctual, you will come to the class regularly, you will study, you will be so alive that you will want to do things rightly" (Krishnamurti, 2012, p.31). Therefore, self-discipline should be the moral of life.

Examination and Evaluation

The present examination system is suppressing fearless learning and promoting exam phobia. Krishnamurti rejected the conventional examination system, which he saw as the root cause of the downfall of present education. Krishnamurti thought that students should not learn in fear of examinations. They must learn from natural interest. Adopting a positive mindset, teachers can help learners by assessing their cognition through formative tests, informal discussions, and other methods such as seminars, debates, and assignments. Through this form of formative assessment, teachers can easily observe their students' progress and rearrange their teaching and learning plan. They must provide a detailed report of progress rather than just marks or grades, which leads to competition. Krishnamurti therefore offered an alternative education, praising the 'art of living' as a form of learning.

Findings

The only concern of Jiddu Krishnamurti was to release humankind from the slavery of social boundaries. Conventional education never allows for the experience of freedom. True education helps one to be oneself and understand life. Nevertheless, modern exam-based education breeds thoughtless entities. The idea of 'Right Education' helps us discover our true selves. His declaration about education is based on humanistic education, as reflected in the goals of the education he offers. In his view, a teacher should take responsibility for nurturing all the qualities in students that lead to humanity. He envisages the school as a powerhouse of wisdom.

Conclusion

The reflections of Krishnamurti's educational philosophy in the National Educational Policy 2020 affirm its validity in the present scenario. It helps the policymaker in the right direction. After reviewing the NEP 2020, it appears this policy is intended to support a holistic, integrated education system. It aims to develop the capacity for humility, empathy, and courage, and to support the acquisition of a scientific attitude, resilience, creativity, critical thinking, and metacognitive skills. It is only possible when we meet certain preconditions, such as a school that serves as an empowering institution, an integrated curriculum, a teacher who is a holistic educator, and supportive parents. Furthermore, the NEP 2020, which has reflections of Krishnamurti's philosophy, inspires hope of transformation, the transformation of progress.

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The 24/7 Classroom: Blended Learning for a New Era

Priyanka Bose Das, PhD
Assistant Professor
Department of Education
Budge Budge College,
West Bengal, India
Email: pbd4141@gmail.com

Abstract:

We are gearing up for advancement with the modern network at our disposal. Proper utilization of the technology is in our grip. Minimizing the generation and geographical gaps is our primary objective. We are a pioneer in this venture. Our limit is the sky. We can explore the knowledge of a group of knowledgeable personalities with vast experience in their respective field. They are already with us and ready to volunteer their expertise at any time in this project to educate a large mass of knowledge-hungry people in our country. We like to excavate and unmask our vast hidden knowledge base, such as the introduction of "Sriniketan" by Rabindranath Tagore and others. For this purpose, we will encourage our students to learn our classical languages, in which the treasure of knowledge remained locked in ancient books throughout India. We can foresee that Blended Learning Mode - a style of education in which students learn via electronic and online media, as well as traditional face-to-face teaching. - getting success, and we are presenting a gift of Neo-Modern Digital India to our nation. Addressing the accessibility gap in higher education across diverse regions and demographics, this study examines the extent to which open-and-distance learning (ODL) is viable for reaching students at the grassroots level and presents an overview of blended learning for the new era, outlining its challenges and prospects.

Keywords: Blended Learning, Cloud-based classroom, Digitalization, GER.



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Introduction

By harnessing the potential of blended learning through digital universities, we can bridge the educational divide and empower marginalized communities. This innovative approach can provide high-quality education, flexibility, and accessibility, ultimately fostering a more inclusive and equitable education system. As Gokhale's visionary words continue to resonate, 'What Bengal thinks today India thinks tomorrow,' we can reimagine this to 'What India achieves today in education, the world can aspire to tomorrow, thereby transforming the nation's human capital into a global force for progress and development.

Objective of the study

To cope with the difficulties of the formal higher education system, there emerged a growing need for open distance learning. This study aims to determine the extent to which open distance learning (ODL) is effective in reaching students at the grassroots level and to provide an overview of blended learning in the new era, outlining its challenges and prospects.

Main Discussion

Literacy in India is a key to socio-economic progress, and the Indian literacy rate is 74.04% (Literacy Rate Census 2011 State-wise, Highest & Lowest, 2025). Despite government programmes, India's literacy rate increased very slowly. There is a wide gender disparity in literacy rates in India: the effective literacy rate (age 7 and above) in 2011 was 82.14% for men and 65.46% for women (Women and Men in India 2022, 2022). The low female literacy rate has a dramatically negative impact on family planning and population stabilization efforts in India (Sahu et al., 2015, pp. 50-54).

The rate varies worldwide, with developed nations having a rate of 99.2% (2013); Oceania having 71.3%; South and West Asia having 70.2% (2015), and sub-Saharan Africa at 64.0% (2015) (Adult and Youth Literacy: National, Regional and Global Trends, 1985–2015, n.d.). Over 75% of the world's 781 million illiterate adults are found in South Asia, West Asia, and sub-Saharan Africa, and women represent almost two-thirds of all illiterate adults globally. The institutional framework of higher education in India comprises universities and Colleges. As reported in 2015, India has 799 universities and 38,498 colleges. There are three types of universities: Conventional Universities, Deemed Universities, and Institutions of National Importance.

Higher education in India suffers from several systemic deficiencies. As a result, it continues to produce an increasing number of unemployed and unemployable graduates, despite emerging shortages of skilled workers across an ever-growing number of sectors. The issues can be broadly categorized into structural and pedagogical challenges. Structural issues include income and gender disparities in enrollment, a predominantly urban higher education population, poor governance, insufficient funding, and the lack of accessibility for rural populations. Pedagogical problems include poor-quality faculty and teaching, a general lack of student motivation and interest, and obsolete teaching methods.

On the whole, India has an enrollment rate of 9%, which is similar to that of other lower-middle-income countries. The population enrolled in higher education is largely urban. Rural enrollment in higher education is very low. There is also a disparity in higher education enrollment by gender.

A few of the many reasons are -

1. Though regulatory agencies set fees to cover an institution's expenses and a basic surplus, many institutions have been charging fees that make the venture profitable. These mushrooming institutes are much more glamorous and less qualitative.
2. There is a massive gap between those who leave school and those who enroll in higher education, which needs to be bridged. This gap occurs due to—
 - a) A long distance to be covered to reach the higher education institute.
 - b) Expensive for many to get a car or hire one to get to the institute regularly.
 - c) Due to conservatism still prevailing in many areas and caste, religion, the girls are deprived of higher education.
 - d) Many have to earn money for family maintenance, and especially girls have to take care of younger family members after completing their education. So they cannot avail themselves of higher education at their own convenience.
 - e) It is also difficult for people with physical disabilities to attend college regularly.
 - f) Students with special needs also find it challenging to meet the requirements of higher education in the so-called inclusive setup, which remains only a theory.
3. Lacking a common platform: In India, apart from UGC (University Grants Commission), there are several regulatory bodies, such as AICTE, MCI, BCI, NCTE, and those under state governments. These individual bodies move along different paths, creating various hurdles, such as exams and teaching methods for students. So we need to bring all the important regulatory bodies onto a common platform and develop a shared understanding and strategy for managing the change.
4. Lacking sufficient faculty: A shortage of quality faculty is proving to be a significant stumbling block to the transformation of higher education in India. This has created a shortage of almost 56 percent in the higher education faculty talent pool; such a deficiency will prove a significant stumbling block (Around 56.18% of professor positions unfilled in leading Indian universities: report, 2025).
5. Lack of new teaching methods: The Indian higher education system has been using the lecture-and-board method for several years. This has turned ineffective and insufficient in many areas. Additionally, there is a lack of identified teacher learning and development needs that should be addressed through education. There are no approaches such as mentoring, spot visits, practical educational tours, or involvement in research projects with peers.
6. Development of teachers: Finally, there is no syllabus for integrating development concepts such as emotional competencies, life skills, and information-savvy skills. Educational institutions often lack the emphasis on learning outcomes rather than content teaching. Many institutions never take the initiative to collaborate with international institutions to gain exposure to digital learning methods or technologies.

7. Accountability and performance of teachers: At present, there is no mechanism to ensure the accountability and performance of professors in universities and colleges. This is unlike at foreign universities, where peers and students evaluate college faculty performance.
8. Problem with pedagogy: Pedagogy and assessment are focused on input and rote learning; students have few opportunities to develop a broader range of transversal skills, including critical thinking, analytical reasoning, problem-solving, and collaborative working.
9. Infrastructure problem: Inadequate infrastructure. In India, many universities lack adequate infrastructure or facilities to teach students. Even many private universities are running courses without classrooms. Internet and Wi-Fi facilities are still out of reach for many students.
10. Lack of teacher involvement in administrative issues: Most professors and higher authorities do not participate in education-related activities. They stick to their own growth and teaching only.

To address the difficulties of the formal higher education system, there emerged a growing need for an open distance-learning mode. The primary objective of the ODL is to provide knowledge and skills to those who did not have access to learning. The basic purpose of the open universities is to provide instruction to the learners at their doorsteps through various media and technology (UNESCO, 2002)

The concept of an open learning and distance education system focuses on open access to education and training, enabling learners to be free from the constraints of time and place and offering flexible learning opportunities for individuals and groups. The advantage of technology in distance learning is that students can watch lectures before coming to class and engage in more interactive activities during class. It also allows for consistent delivery of content, as online videos can be prerecorded and shared with the rest of the class.

E-Learning can support learning processes, collaboration, flexibility, and the distribution of education and training, as well as the evaluation of content and skills in distance learning. Previously, the open universities were more often used by young matriculated students who had not gained a study place at a “proper” university. However, nowadays, students are more often adults in professional positions who want to enhance their qualifications, skills, and competencies via e-learning by enrolling in web-based courses. These adult learners may be driven by distinct motivations, such as career advancement, transitioning to new fields, or personal enrichment. Tailoring e-learning programs to these varied goals can make them more effective and engaging. It is suitable for eliminating face-to-face training and development costs, both in monetary terms and in terms of productivity loss, as learners spend time away from their daily activities and jobs to participate in face-to-face training sessions. E-Learning courses are available 24/7, location-independent, and provide practical, efficient training for learners in geographically dispersed areas and across time zones. Some students may require digital literacy to participate successfully in everyday life, which is increasingly mediated by technology. To offer relevant learning experiences in distance learning, lecturers need to develop new skills and knowledge about technologies.

Distance learning students can care for their families and incorporate instruction into online courses, which can afford them the opportunity to work while raising their families and pursuing their full-time jobs. Distance learning can also benefit students because of the flexibility it offers in

when and where they can engage in their learning. ICTs can enable distance-learning institutions to provide distance-learning platforms, enabling many students situated far from the centers of learning to educate themselves. Generally, it is believed that e-learning was designed for purposeful and disciplined students, because there is no direct contact with the lecturer, which may increase the demand for them to work independently. Distance learning in higher education can teach students skills and competencies for professional development, such as self-study, planning and organizing, time management, problem-solving, taking responsibility, working under pressure, and being creative and innovative.

However, there are a few challenges for open distance learning, such as -

1. The high cost of information and communication infrastructure, and the dearth of technical expertise, are possible challenges in distance learning.
2. Sometimes the study material or open content developed is challenging to follow, which reduces learners' enthusiasm for their studies.
3. The lack of a precise quality assurance mechanism may result in unclear standards and, consequently, poor quality in distance education.
4. In distance learning, marginalized students, such as the impaired and the economically disadvantaged, may be further excluded from educational practices when ICT is used. Some students may not be able to afford technology if it is not free or subsidized. These students are also often unable to use the ICT due to institutional failures to comply with legal and technical requirements for impaired students. To address these challenges and promote digital equity, a brief plan can be put in place. Establishing community Wi-Fi hubs in underserved areas can provide much-needed internet access.
5. Additionally, offering device subsidies or rental programs could ensure that every student has the necessary tools to participate in distance learning. By implementing these solutions, the educational system can help reduce the digital divide and ensure that all students, regardless of background, have equal opportunities to learn. There is growing concern that distance learning is compromising the quality of education, partly because one key challenge is the lack of appropriate interaction practices.
6. Language barrier is also a problem in distance education.
7. Another challenge for distance learning in higher education is how course content meets the expectations of students seeking career growth and personal and professional development through distance learning.
8. Problems caused by the lack of direct contact between the student and the lecturer.
9. Problems associated with feelings of alienation and isolation from the student community.
10. Problems associated with anxiety and concerns regarding the education process and learning results.

Why Digital University

The higher education system needs to overcome barriers such as insufficient teachers, limited student intake capacity, and high dropout rates to reach students at the grassroots level and increase

the gross enrolment ratio (GER). A large number of students are regularly deprived due to a lack of association with livelihood, and the nation is losing not only the maximum merit every year but also its human resources. A digitalized external support system for students who cannot afford the fees of private tutors, or even the cost of other educational fees. Thus, a blended learning mode is needed to provide free higher education to 30 to 40% of students from BPL backgrounds, and a concession will also be given to meritorious students based on their merit. Blended learning is the practice of integrating both online and in-person learning experiences. In contrast, an online course involves 100% online course delivery with little or no face-to-face sessions. Blended learning combines these elements, with face-to-face class sessions accompanied by online materials and activities, creating a combination of live and online learning -

- Blended learning is more efficient.
- Blended learning makes education more accessible.
- Students can pace themselves.
- Teachers can become more engaged with their students.
- This method is more fun for everyone.

Practically, we believe that NEP 2020 is a Milestone in the Indian education system, especially for students in rural areas of India and for students in underdeveloped countries.

By the end of 2020, the pandemic had devastated the global education system. It taught everybody the difference between open distance learning and the concept of Digital University, which has some unique features unlike the so-called ODL system of education, for example: direct interaction between the teacher and the taught, multimedia applications specifically for lab-based subjects, PowerPoint presentations, different visualized applications, door-step classroom catering, etc. The importance of online classes was first felt worldwide during pandemic times. Surprisingly, we found that without appropriate technological knowledge, this online teaching procedure falls on deaf ears in many cases. All this happened because most of the HEIs did not know the difference between a digitized education system and the digitalization of the education system. Effort is needed to provide a digitalized external support system for students who cannot afford the fees of private tutors, even their other educational fees.

Significant features of the Blended Mode of Learning through Cloud-Based University:

1. The broadness of the Digital University Education System allows HS pass (+2) students for entry into UG Courses (Certificate/Diploma/Degree) and any bachelor's degree(only degree holder) student for entry into Master's degree. The only criterion is their passion for the subject (s) to be taken. In addition to degrees in traditional subjects, there are opportunities to learn local knowledge through digital media. Any person interested in Indian native knowledge and skill can come into contact through the courses designed by local classical celebrities. Moreover, multiple entries at various points in their study programme are possible only at our University.

2. Every digital programme has "four quadrants" - Video Lectures, E-Content, Discussion Forum, online student-teacher interaction, and self-assessment. "Learners' engagement" is proposed to be monitored by tracking their participation in discussions and assignments.
3. The admission will be entirely online. Once admitted, the student will receive any support needed. Our lectures will be available 24/7 for students so they can attend their classes at their convenience. This conception is constructive for students engaged in livelihood. "The Classroom – which never sleeps" is our mission.

Added values

- Age will be no bar(to follow the NEP guideline for Adult Education).
 - The completion of the course is not time-bound.
 - In the actual application of the CBCS method, education will have no classification into Science, Arts, and Commerce—the degree to be given based on the core subject one studies.
 - To enhance skills, the University will take care of its students and arrange different market-oriented skill enhancement courses (free of cost).
 - Campus less 'e-campus', an effective idea to build up a healthy relationship among the University, Teachers, and Students.
1. Know our Nation: The University will design its UG and PG syllabi in a special format to make the world conversant with Ancient India's rich heritage in Science and Technology, Economics, Classical Cultural fields, Astronomy, Architecture, Metallurgy, Logic, Mathematics, Surgery, Medicine, Mineralogy, etc.
 2. Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) compatibility: The objectives of Digital University are expected to help increase the GER rapidly due to its advanced technology. Only through this University can we easily reach out to dropout students and encourage them to resume their studies. We can uphold women's education, Adult Education, education for persons with disabilities, and education for the economically weaker sections of society. It is projected that these efforts could raise the GER from 27% to 35% within five years, thereby enhancing the educational landscape in alignment with the NEP (India needs 86 million higher education enrolments by 2035 to meet NEP goals, says new report, 2025).
 3. Anti-Reservation: Digital University refuses to accept any barriers in the name of imparting knowledge to one and all. Hence, no caste or class-based reservation is accepted. Nevertheless, nearly 50 percent of the seats will be reserved for the economically weaker section. It shall be considered as the 'Best Effort' of the institution.
 4. Education and Employability: No education can be completed without its application in the job market to sustain the livelihood of the incumbent. Digital University will seek assistance from the public sector to ensure the placement of each of its students.
 5. Service to the society at large: Being endowed with advanced technological applications, even after maintaining a host of most qualified teachers for a particular course to the maximum possible number of students, Digital University is committed to serve the community by

contributing the surplus amount of annual turn-over to the Welfare Fund of the government of India with some sorts of conditions for the shake our students' interest.

6. Education and Employability: No education can be completed without its application in the job market to sustain the livelihood of the incumbent. Digital University will seek assistance from the public sector to ensure the placement of each of its students.
7. The UG and PG degrees will be awarded upon completion of a defined number of credit points. The credit points will also comply with UGC requirements. A student can earn credit in their own interest and at their own pace as a game. The credit point will be saved in the Credit Bank for future utilization. There is no time limit for completing a course. Learners must earn a defined number of Credit Points to obtain a degree. A student can relax and complete the course in their own time. Credit will be earned through a fully proofed Online Examination System, built explicitly for our esteemed University by our strong technical team.
8. Heritage Enlightenment: In this University, we excavate our rich heritage knowledge alongside traditional Western knowledge. It can be said to be the merger of Eastern knowledge with Western knowledge. It will try to preserve our strong family bonding.
9. Establishing hand-to-hand relations between the Education world and the Corporate world.

Conclusion

Inspired by Acharya Prafulla Chandra Roy, the University believes that a strong relationship between the University and Industries always strengthens our policies, such as employment, dynamic and realistic research, and various social development works, which, in turn, helps strengthen the University and Industries. To assure academic modernization, which requires a stress-free work culture and an open-market outlook in place of today's secretariat outlook everywhere. In this University, our vast heritage knowledge is excavated alongside traditional Western knowledge. It can be said to be the merger of Eastern and Western knowledge.

We are gearing up for advancement with the modern net-world at our disposal. Proper utilization of this technology is in our grasp. Minimizing the generation and geographical gaps is our primary objective. India can become a pioneer in this venture. The limit is sky. Digital University is needed to excavate and unmask our vast hidden knowledge base, such as the introduction of "Sriniketan" by Rabindranath Tagore and others. For this purpose, we will encourage our students to learn our classical languages, in which the treasure of knowledge remained locked in ancient books throughout India. We foresee our project as a success, and we are presenting a gift of Neo-Modern Digital India to our nation. As we conclude, we hope policymakers, educators, and industry leaders will form an association dedicated to transforming this vision into reality. Together, we can drive initiatives that strengthen both the traditional and modern educational paradigms, ensuring that Digital University becomes a cornerstone of global educational innovation. This collective approach will not only propel India forward but also serve as a model for nations worldwide.

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Development-Induced Displacement and Marginality: Case studies from West Bengal

Paramita Sarkar Ranjit
Assistant Professor
Department of Geography
Seth Soorajmull Jalan Girls' College
Kolkata, West Bengal, India
Email: pr.geography@gmail.com

Abstract

The term "development-induced displacement" (DID) refers to the forced expropriation of land that causes widespread loss of livelihoods due to large-scale development projects. DID is a serious social issue in India that became prominent with post-independence modernization programs and was further worsened by the 1991 neoliberal economic reforms. This study looks at the devastating extent of DID, the dangers of poverty that Project Affected Persons (PAPs) face as a result, and the ongoing failure of legal and policy frameworks to ensure fair rehabilitation. The study, which focuses particularly on West Bengal, demonstrates how the pursuit of industrialization, urbanization, and infrastructure development programs disproportionately affect the already marginalized, including tribal and Dalit communities. In this context, two case studies from West Bengal have been reviewed to highlight the impact of land acquisition and the consequent changes in the lives of displaced people.

Keywords: Displacement, Marginality, Identity crisis.



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Introduction

According to Thirlwall (1986), "development" entails change and is used to depict the process of economic and social transformation. People are considered the country's greatest strength, according to the World Bank's Human Development Report, 1990. Hence, creating an enabling atmosphere for healthy and creative lives is the fundamental goal of development (Chaudhury, 2001). To accomplish this goal, the concept of development encompasses advancements across socioeconomic, cultural, educational, and technological domains that drive economic transformation (Goswami, Ghosh, 2024). Displacement, on the other hand, refers to the forcible expulsion of people from their homes or regular places of residence (Bhattacharya, 2013). There are two types of displacement: external displacement, which results in refugee status, and internal displacement, when people stay inside their nation's borders (Tuli, K., 2019).

When large-scale development projects (such as dams, reservoirs, mines, power plants, or urban infrastructure development schemes) compel people to leave their homes and lands, it is known as development-induced displacement (Ahmed, 2014). While most people benefit from development initiatives in terms of economic advancement and overall well-being, others who are forcibly moved suffer greatly. In his study, Cernea (2001) stated that over the last two decades of the 20th century, development programs caused the displacement of about 10 million people per year, totaling nearly 200 million globally. Because of its frequency, extent, and dire consequences, DID has become a worldwide problem (Cernea, 2001). Minority Report (2017) shows that minorities and indigenous peoples, facing long-lasting processes of exclusion, are particularly vulnerable to displacement (Minority Rights Group International, 2017). As most of the development projects are usually located in remote villages, hilly or forested areas, the displaced tend to be the minorities and indigenous people of the area concerned (Lama, M.P, 2000). Forceful grabbing of land without proper rehabilitation confirms the scope of marginality and insecurity of these people (Fernandes, 2021).

Marginalization is a situation that reflects different types of social, economic, and cultural helplessness endured by some underprivileged groups in society (Das and Kumar, 2024). According to Hussain (2007), marginalized groups frequently experience social exclusion, discrimination, and restricted access to resources and services. When land acquisition took place, these already vulnerable groups were thus disproportionately impacted by development-induced displacement (Bhattacharya, 2013). Sharma (2021) asserts that marginalization due to geographic isolation has detrimental effects on identity construction. As a result, displacement can cause marginalized communities to experience a severe identity crisis by upsetting the pillars that support their sense of self and belonging (Bhattacharya, 2013).

DID in India

India is a country of diverse cultures, where the majority of the population depend on land and forests for their sustenance, and most of them are poor (Guha, 2013, p. 218). So, any development activity that does not safeguard these people against the hidden risks behind the development efforts creates uncertainty and discontent among them. After India gained independence, the Nehruvian model, which prioritized modernizing projects such as highways, mines, factories, and dams, led to large-scale land acquisition and the resulting displacement for

the greater good (Siddiqui, 2012). In 1991, with the introduction of economic liberalization, more land acquisition by private farms became the principal stance of the central Government (Fernandes, 2011). As there was no legal prohibition, mostly agricultural lands, forest areas were grabbed or encroached upon for industrial and other development purposes. Immediate disruption of sustenance for future employment opportunities left the displaced families in a situation worse than before. Therefore, development-induced displacement might be seen as a sign of an underlying crisis in the development paradigm itself, resulting in an unequal distribution of gains and losses that favour a minority, rather than just an unintentional outcome (Siddiqui, 2012).

Regarding the number of project-impacted individuals (PAPs) or displaced persons (DPs) in India, there is no reliable government database. According to the Indian Social Institute, 21.3 million people have been displaced by development projects in India; of them, 16.4 million have been displaced by dams, 2.55 million by mines, 1.25 million by industrial development, and 0.6 million by wildlife sanctuaries (Lama, 2000).

According to independent studies, at least 70 million people lost their means of subsistence between 1951 and 2010 without actually moving. Merely 17% of those affected have been relocated. Studies show that vulnerable groups comprised more than 80% of the displaced population (40% tribal people, 20% Dalits, and 20% rural poor). This suggests that millions of individuals pay the price without benefiting from the development, while only a minority group is consistently given preference (Fernandes, 2021).

Two case studies from West Bengal-Rajahat and Bowbazar, have been critically reviewed in this paper for a comprehensive analysis of the impact of land grabbing in the name of “Development”.

Methodology

In order to provide a thorough analysis of the issue under consideration, this work has made considerable use of secondary sources of data gathered through literature, facts from official records, books, journals, etc.

Major causes of DID in India

Dams and Irrigation: In India, dams account for around 75% of all displaced people, making them the single most significant cause of displacement. For instance, the Sardar Sarovar project badly impacted the tribal community by displacing 163,000 people and affecting approximately 300 villages. The Polavaram irrigation project in Andhra Pradesh led to the mass relocation of about 150,000 people. The Rihand Dam in Madhya Pradesh and the Ukai Dam in Gujarat displaced almost 30,000 and 52,000 people, respectively (Siddiqui, 2012). Fernandes estimated that a major dam can affect 25000 -250000 people while a medium dam displaces 400-8000 people (Fernandes, 2008).

Industrialization and Mining: Land grabbing and conflict result from mining and industrial initiatives targeting resource-rich areas, such as Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, and Orissa, which are frequently home to sizable tribal populations.

SEZs, Urban Expansion, and transportation projects: slum clearance and modernization projects, corporate-led industrialization and land acquisition for initiatives like Special Economic

Zones (SEZs), building up of communication and transportation networks, and establishment of opulent townships often cause a massive amount of forceful land acquisition and the resultant impoverishment.

Socioeconomic and Cultural Consequences of DID

The traumatic experience of development-induced displacement leads to widespread poverty and societal disintegration. Cernea (2001) has mentioned eight types of hazards in his “Impoverishment Risks and Reconstruction (IRR) Model” to examine the grave consequences that Project Affected People (PAPs) face. Landlessness, unemployment, homelessness, marginalization, food insecurity, increased illness, loss of access to resources on common property, and community disarticulation are the main hazards (Cernea 2001). The expropriation of land eliminates the primary basis of people's productive systems. Traditional livelihoods are frequently lost due to forced relocation. The displaced are frequently marginalized because they lack the skills required for new positions in developmental initiatives. As a result, poverty rises, and displaced people may be forced to migrate seasonally in search of temporary work. Communities, especially indigenous ones, rely on resources such as forests, grazing land, and water bodies for their existence, but displacement prevents access to these resources. The dismantling of kinship ties, family systems, and social networks results in the cultural destruction of indigenous populations, including the loss of native languages, communal lifestyles, dietary customs, religious rituals, and estrangement from ancestral sacred areas and sites of worship. It has been observed that women and children suffer the most from displacement brought on by development. Because Indian society is patriarchal, women usually do not have official land titles and are therefore not compensated when land is bought. In addition, forced relocation can result in domestic violence and heightened feelings of insecurity at new locations. Children suffer as well; they frequently lose access to healthcare and education and are even forced into child labour to augment declining family finances.

DID and Identity Crisis

Place, community, and social networks are frequently closely linked to identity (KIBREAB.G, 2000). These ties are broken by displacement, which results in emotions of alienation, rootlessness, and a loss of both tangible and metaphorical home (Hussain, 2007). They are frequently unable to meet their most basic demands since they are pulled from their accustomed surroundings and social support systems.

Cultural and Identitarian Crisis: For tribal and backward-caste communities in particular, displacement can disrupt cultural customs, traditions, and social systems, leading to a crisis of identity (Bhattacharya, 2013). **Stigma and Othering:** People who are displaced, particularly those who are already marginalized, may experience stigma and discrimination in their new surroundings, which further damages their sense of identity and self-worth (Hussain, 2007). Host communities could see them as a burden (Cotroneo, 2018).

Difficulties in Developing an Identity: In the lack of recognizable cultural and social moorings, identity formation can be especially difficult for younger generations who were uprooted at a young age (Sharma and Phogat, 2023). Identity formation can be significantly impacted by labels such as "displaced person" (Camargo and others, 2020).

Psychological discomfort and Trauma: Significant psychological discomfort, such as sadness and anxiety, can result from the trauma of displacement combined with the loss of identity and social support (Sharma and Phogat, 2023).

Loopholes in the Government Policy and Legal Framework

In India, the lack of political will to formulate a comprehensive policy and the persistent inadequacies of existing laws remain key challenges. The number of displaced and project-affected persons is huge, and the percentage of rehabilitation is negligible (Table 1).

Regardless of the severity of the problem, awareness is tremendously low in the country.

Table 1 Weak Rehabilitation Scenario in India

State	DPs	Resettled	% of resettled	Period
Andhra Pradesh	2358274	440090	18.66	1951-2010
Gujarat	690322	164498	23.82	1947-2004
Assam	307024	11000	3.58	1947-2000
Odissa	548794	192840	35.27	1965-1995
Kerala	219633	30036	13.68	1951-1995
Goa	35897	8375	23.33	1965-1995
West Bengal	3634271	400000	11.01	1947-2000
Meghalaya	38973	1000	2.57	1947-2010
Mizoram	191406	7371	3.85	1947-2010

Source: Fernandes, 2021, p-14

The Land Acquisition Act of 1894 (also known as the colonial law) provided only monetary compensation based on the land's value at the time of notice. It frequently ignored the long-term socioeconomic effects of relocation and remained a significant source of injustice even after independence. Provision for rehabilitation was nil for the displaced and dispossessed farmers, artisans, and landless agricultural labourers. Even though there was no provision for getting consent before land acquisition from private owners. After 118 years of its existence Indian Government took the initiative to replace this extremely harsh and cruel law of land acquisition (Guha, A,2013). Although the issue was acknowledged, resettlement remained a very challenging task. Women from subaltern backgrounds were most impacted. The majority of relocation packages prioritized men over the needs of women (Fernandes,2021). The National Rehabilitation and Resettlement Policy (NRRP) was introduced by the Indian Government in 2007. It has been criticized for having the potential to escalate conflicts and for being improperly implemented, frequently leading to arbitrary cash compensation rather than authentic land-for-land restoration. Additionally, states have different, and often inadequate, ad hoc strategies due to the absence of consistent national R&R policies.

While the right to fair compensation and transparency make the Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act 2013 more effective and legally more powerful, later proposals have been made to weaken important protections like the requirement of "prior informed consent" and "social impact assessment" in state land acquisition laws, making it more straightforward to obtain land for development. It disregards social, cultural, and psychological effects in favour of economic gain. Resettlement and increased compensation can ease some of

the suffering, but they will not be able to stop marginalization and poverty in the long run. Additionally, the Act says nothing about employment for DPs and PAPs (Fernandes,2021).

DID in West Bengal

Like many other states, West Bengal has seen widespread displacement of families from their homes and agricultural fields due to development projects, urbanization, and subsequent forcible land purchases. In a 1989 paper, Walter Fernandes and associates used Government data to show that 11,300 individuals were displaced when 6,633.44 hectares of land were purchased for the Durgapur Steel Plant in West Bengal. Among the displaced, 3.39 percent were tribal (Fernandes et al. 1989). In the same article, Fernandes quoted another Government source that stated there were 114 mines (all coal mines) in West Bengal up to 1983. Though the Human Development Report, West Bengal did not cover any document on it (WBHDR, 2004)

Table 2 *Displacement scenario from West Bengal (1947-2000)*

State	Tribals	%	Dalit	%	Others	%	NA	%	Total
West Bengal	1330663	19.16	1689607	24.33	2566223	36.95	1357999	19.56	6944492

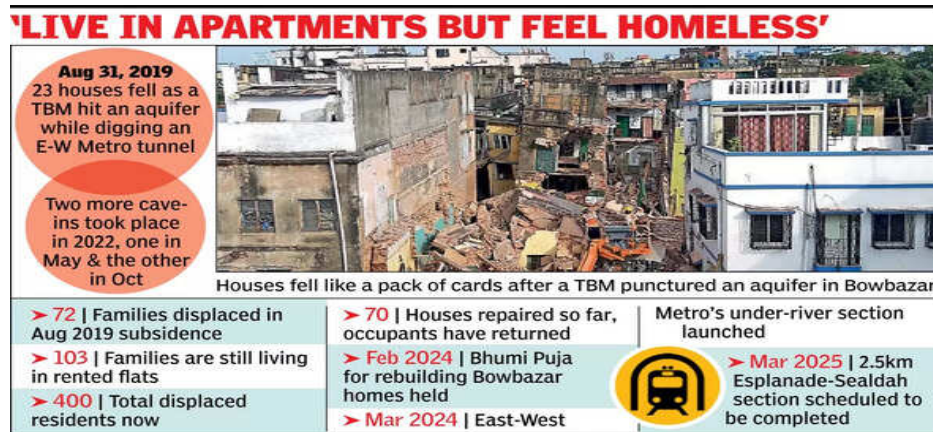
Source: Fernandes, Chhetri, Lama & Joseph, 2012, p-17

It was estimated that, out of 6944492 displaced people between 1947 and 2000 (Table 2), only 11.01 percent (Table 1) were resettled (Fernandes, 2000). However, it was not proper rehabilitation, as the displaced people who were resettled received very few of the amenities they needed to establish homes. This suggests that, for most displaced people in West Bengal, relocation was a primary cause of dispossession, exacerbated by an approach that did not assist them in re-establishing their social and economic lives.

Case Study from West Bengal

A. Displacement scars in Durga Pituri Lane, Bowbazar, Kolkata:

The tunneling mishap by the Kolkata Metro (in August 2019), which struck an aquifer and caused ground collapse in Durga Pituri Lane, Bowbazar, resulted in severe displacement and structural damage to houses. Since then, a large number of families have been uprooted, some permanently, while others are currently living in temporary housing. Over 400 individuals were displaced as a result of the 2019 catastrophe, which resulted in cracks in at least 52 buildings and the demolition of 24 residences. Many of the evacuated residents were placed in hotels or rented homes. In 2022, additional tunneling mishaps led to additional cracks and displacement. The 24 demolished buildings are being rebuilt, and depending on the source, the project is expected to be finished by October 2026 or late 2027. Concerns regarding the safety of existing structures continue as rehabilitation moves forward, and some displaced families have been waiting years to return to their homes (Source: The Hindu, October 14, 2022; The Times of India, 31st August, 2024).



Source: Times of India, 31st August, 2024

Even after 6 years, when the East-West Metro starts running its full course from Howrah to Sector V, the pains of the displaced persist. While a few have received new homes, many are still waiting for rehabilitation. Depression, anxiety started to engulf many of them due to the uncertain future and the inordinate delay by the Railway Authority.

B. Development-Induced Displacement in Rajarhat

One of the most notable instances of development-induced displacement in post-liberalization India is the construction of New Town Rajarhat on the north-eastern outskirts of Kolkata. Rajarhat was designed in the 1990s by the Left Front Government as a "world-class," environmentally friendly satellite city to relieve traffic in Kolkata and attract investment in the developing IT and real estate industries. Beneath the growth, there was a story of systematic marginalization of the local agrarian community, violent dispossession, and erasure of livelihoods.



Source: Times of India, 31st August, 2022

Before 1995, Rajarhat was a vast agricultural region with ponds, wetlands, and flower nurseries. Small and marginal farmers, sharecroppers, and fishermen made up the majority of the population; many were from Muslim and Dalit communities (Dey, Samaddar & Sen, 2013). Through the trade of fish, vegetables, and other items, the region was closely linked to Kolkata's economy. Approximately 130,000 people were displaced when the Government chose to turn this area into a planned township by acquiring land from 34 villages, totaling about 37 square kilometers (Sengupta, 2013).

The acquisition was led by the West Bengal Housing Infrastructure Development Corporation (HIDCO). Although compensation was given, it was often below market value and extremely unfair. Fishermen, sharecroppers, and tenants who had minor or ambiguous land titles got almost nothing. In addition to creating new hierarchies among the displaced people, this also led to economic and spatial marginalization. The poorest people were left without a means of subsistence, whereas large landowners and politically connected families frequently benefited (Kundu, 2016). A large portion of Rajarhat's displacement was dislocation in dwelling, in contrast to most instances of physical migration. Numerous corporate campuses, freeways, and high-rise housing covered the area. Only homestead plots remained after their agricultural lands were taken. In order to house low-wage workers like domestic helpers, security guards, and drivers, the Government generated service villages to serve the township's new middle-class and upper-class residents (Kundu, 2016). The marginalized villagers' agrarian economy collapsed due to land loss. Former farmers, sharecroppers, and fishermen were compelled to engage in hazardous jobs such as housekeeping, construction, or unofficial selling (Sengupta, 2013). However, many people, especially the older generation, opposed these jobs because they considered them low-paying and undignified. Some of the compensated individuals invested in rental properties, becoming small landlords who rented rooms to migrant labourers. Others, particularly the lowest caste groups and the landless, descended into extreme poverty and had to rely on daily wage labour or unofficial rubbish collection (Kundu, 2016).

The social structure of village life was also crushed by the transition from an agricultural to an urban economy. Competition and fragmentation replaced long-standing networks of communal unity, social groups, and kinship. The wealthiest became richer, while the poor got poorer. Village identity was at stake. Urban culture, representing both opportunity and moral decay in terms of alcohol consumption, growing material desires, and the grabbing of land (Basak, 2013). The peasants were referred to as "invisible citizens" in official planning documents. They were not included in the new economy or acknowledged as legitimate urban dwellers. They were allowed to remain but had no official claim to the city's resources, infrastructure, or Government (Kundu, 2016).

Local governance was also altered by the relocation process. New informal power structures emerged as government-controlled semi-autonomous bodies like HIDCO and NKDA overtook official institutions such as panchayats. Through syndicates—networks that combined economic and coercive power—local political brokers and "big men" controlled contracts, land deals, and labour recruitments (Roy & Kundu, 2017). The Syndicate Raj served as a hidden form of Government. It distributed contracts and jobs, acting as a mediator between politicians, developers, and the displaced common people. As a result, the lines between lawfulness and illegality were vague due to this combination of Governmental, market, and local muscular power (Lund, 2006). In order to fulfil their requirements, the displaced poor became obedient to these unofficial sovereigns.

Regardless of the unjust structures, displaced villagers and migrants engaged in regular forms of resistance and negotiation. They established unofficial marketplaces, organized through hawkers' unions, and formed strategic partnerships with bureaucrats or politicians who shared their views (Kundu, 2017). Therefore, Rajarhat's growth is a continuously changing landscape of settlement and unsettlement rather than a straight line of urban advancement (Gururani, 2017). The dichotomy of neoliberal urbanization in India—a process that promises progress while

creating profound dispossession—is best shown by the Rajarhat. Layers of precarity, discrimination, and injustice are hidden behind the township's gorgeous appearance. Rajarhat's development demonstrates how the Government's deliberate informality exploits marginalized bodies to create “world-class” metropolitan environments. Though the displaced have not vanished, instead, they have adapted, resisted, and reinvented their relationship to the city. However, their rights remain unclear, and their existence remains at risk.

Conclusion

Resettlement, however, is often unavoidable, and the findings of this study indicate the need for much more attention to livelihood issues when development projects are adopted. Forced removal in the name of “development” is growing rapidly around the world, and there is no organized solution to this humanitarian crisis. The protection of Displaced People is a big challenge for our country. State responsibility is paramount. Prior consent from the people who are going to be displaced by the developmental activities, the rights of special vulnerable groups such as indigenous people, women, and children must be taken into account. The Central and State Governments should take a joint initiative to implement effective interventions to support the psychosocial well-being of displaced and marginalized communities.

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ডাক সংক্রান্তি: বাংলার এক লৌকিক রীতি

Dak Sankranti: A Folk Tradition of Bengal

Tanusree Mandal

Assistant Professor

Department of Bengali

Government General Degree College,

Kushmandi, Dakshin Dinajpur

West Bengal, India

Email: tanusreemandal4u@gmail.com

Abstract

There are various secular customs or parbans in Bengal. Analyzing the series of these Parbans, the identity of Bengal's society can be found. Especially in rural Bengal, the identity of the peasant class lies in the Parbans; their demands are described in them. One such parban is 'Dak Sankranti'. On the last day of the month, the Sun moves from one Rashi to another, which is called *Sankranti*. *Dak Sankranti* is celebrated on the last day of the Bengali month of Ashwin. At the root of this Parban is a desire for grain. In our agrarian civilization, women are closely associated with agriculture. Grains are produced from the earth. On the other hand, women have the ability to bear children. It is from this sense that femininity is imposed on the world. This is how fertility cults came about. Rice is the main crop of Bengal. When the fruit of this paddy plant comes from the flower, it is fed to the earth by placing it on the pregnant woman's head, according to Bengali custom. This is called *Sadhabbhakhana*. This custom is known as *Dak Sankranti* Parban. This secular custom of Bengal has been analyzed in its entirety in this article.

Keywords: Society, Secular Custom, Farmer, Women, Earth, Grain



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Email: confluence.ssjgc@gmail.com

আমাদের সমাজে বিভিন্ন আচার, অনুষ্ঠান, ব্রত, পার্বণ প্রচলিত। এই পার্বণগুলি প্রচলিত হয়েছে মানুষের আকাঙ্ক্ষা থেকে অর্থাৎ নানারকম চাওয়া থেকে। সেই চাওয়ার রূপ প্রতিফলিত হয়েছে পার্বণগুলিতে ব্যবহৃত সামগ্রীতে ও ছড়ায়। এই চাওয়া থেকে একটি সমাজের মানুষের মানসিকতা স্পষ্ট হয়। আজকের এই বিশ্বায়নের যুগে অবস্থান করে আমাদের সমাজে প্রচলিত এই পার্বণগুলির পরিচয় জানা জরুরি। কারণ এই আচার বা পার্বণ রক্ষিত করে আমাদের দেশীয় সংস্কার। বর্তমান প্রজন্মের কৃষিকাজের প্রতি আগ্রহ হ্রাস পেয়েছে। এই আগ্রহ হারিয়ে যাওয়ার সঙ্গে সঙ্গে হারিয়ে যেতে বসেছে লোকসমাজে প্রচলিত কৃষিকাজ সম্পর্কিত আচারগুলি। আমরা বিস্মৃত হচ্ছি আমাদের নিজস্ব সংস্কার আর সরে যাচ্ছি ক্রমশ শিকড় থেকে দূরে। এই নিবন্ধে কৃষিকাজ সম্পর্কিত এমনই একটি পার্বণের বৃত্তান্ত আলোচিত হয়েছে যা চিনে নিতে সাহায্য করে অতীতের লোকায়ত সংস্কারকে। সাহায্য করে শিকড়কে স্মরণ করে আদিম মাতৃকা পৃথিবীদেবীর কাছে শ্রদ্ধায় নতজানু হতে।

আশ্বিন মাসের সংক্রান্তিতে পশ্চিমবঙ্গে প্রচলিত এক পার্বণ- ডাক সংক্রান্তি। এই পার্বণের মূলে আছে শস্যের আকাঙ্ক্ষা। বঙ্গদেশ কৃষিভিত্তিক। কৃষিভিত্তিক সভ্যতার ধারা বাহিত হয়ে চলেছে আমাদের চেতনায়। এই কৃষিসভ্যতার ধারা বহু প্রাচীন। সভ্যতা বিকাশের আদিপর্বে মানুষ ছিল খাদ্য সংগ্রহকারী ও শিকারজীবী। খাদ্য সংগ্রহকারী থেকে শিকারজীবী হয়েছে মানুষ। সেই শিকার থেকে ক্রমে এসেছে পশুপালন। এটিই হয়ে উঠেছে বেঁচে থাকার জীবিকা। মানুষ তখন ছিল যাযাবর প্রজাতির। এই শিকারজীবিতার পর্ব পেরিয়ে ভ্রাম্যমাণ মানুষ স্থায়িত্ব পেয়েছে কৃষিকাজের মাধ্যমে। সভ্যতার শুরু থেকেই মানুষ বেঁচে থাকার তাগিদে প্রকৃতির কাছে নতজানু হয়েছে। ঋতু অনুযায়ী প্রকৃতির পরিবর্তন বা প্রাকৃতিক শক্তির তাৎপর্য তখনো মানুষের কাছে অধরা ছিল। এই প্রাকৃতিক শক্তির তাৎপর্য বুঝতে না পারা মানুষ বিভিন্ন প্রাকৃতিক শক্তিকে দেবজ্ঞানে পূজা করেছে। এছাড়া বেঁচে থাকার জন্য মানুষ যে জীবিকার উপর নির্ভরশীল ছিল সে পশুপালন হোক বা কৃষি, তাকেও দেবজ্ঞানে পূজা করার একটা ধারা লক্ষিত হয়েছে।

এই কৃষিকাজ শুরু হয়েছে মূলত অনার্য গোষ্ঠীর হাত ধরে। গোষ্ঠীজীবনে প্রাধান্য পেয়েছে মেয়েরা। এই প্রাধান্য পাওয়ার অন্যতম কারণ সন্তানধারণ ক্ষমতা। এই সন্তানধারণ ও সন্তানপালনের তাগিদে গোষ্ঠীবদ্ধ সমাজে মাতৃতান্ত্রিকতার একটা ধারা গড়ে উঠেছে। সন্তান লালিত হয়েছে মাতৃপরিচয়ে, গোষ্ঠীর সন্তানরূপে। পিতৃপরিচয়ের ধারা তখনো গড়ে ওঠেনি সমাজে। এই পরিচয়ের প্রেক্ষিতে মাতৃতান্ত্রিকতা এসেছে সমাজে। এদেশে আগমনকারী আর্য জাতি ছিল মূলত শিকারজীবী। এই শিকার করা থেকে প্রাধান্য পেতে শুরু করেছে পুরুষেরা। পরবর্তীকালে ধীরে ধীরে কৃষিকাজ সম্পর্কিত হয় জীবনধারা। কৃষিকাজের সূত্র ধরেই স্থায়ী বাসস্থানের ধারণা গড়ে ওঠে। সমাজবিজ্ঞানীদের মতে, এই কৃষিকাজ প্রথম এসেছে মেয়েদের মাধ্যমে। কৃষিকাজের ফলেই উদ্ভূত সম্পত্তির অধিকারী হয়েছে মানুষ। সেই ব্যক্তিগত সম্পত্তির উত্তরাধিকারী নির্বাচনের

তাগিদে পিতৃপরিচয়ের প্রয়োজন পড়ে। এখান থেকেই সমাজে তৈরি হয়েছে পিতৃতান্ত্রিকতার ধারা। বৈদিক সাহিত্যে বিশেষত ঋকবেদে দেখা গেছে পুরুষ দেবতার প্রাধান্য। বৈদিক সংহিতার প্রাচীন ব্যাখ্যা আচার্য যাক্স তিনটি দেবতার কথা উল্লেখ করেছেন- অগ্নি, ইন্দ্র, ও সূর্য। এই দেবতার পৃথিবী (Earth), অন্তরীক্ষ (Atmosphere), ও দ্যুলোকের (Heaven) দেবতা। বৈদিক যুগে দেবতার সংখ্যা নিয়ে মতভেদ দেখতে পাওয়া গেছে। কারো মতে, একই দেবতার বিভিন্ন নাম, আবার কারো মতে সমস্ত দেবতাই স্বতন্ত্র। এই বৈদিক ঋষি দেবতা হিসেবে ইন্দ্র, অগ্নি, মিত্র, বরুণ, সূর্য এদের সাথে উষা, সবিতা এই দেবতার কথাও বলেন। উষার যে অরুণ রাগ, তা থেকেই উষাকে বন্দনা করার কথা এসেছে। বৈদিক ঋষিরা প্রকৃতিকে দেবী হিসেবে কল্পনা করেছেন। প্রাকৃতিক দেবদেবীর উপরে মানবত্ব আরোপিত হয়েছে। ঋকবেদে পৃথিবী মাতার স্তুতি দেখতে পাওয়া গেছে। বিশ্বের পিতা ও মাতা হিসেবে দ্যাবাপৃথিবী জননীর কথা বলা হয়েছে। এখানে আকাশ ও পৃথিবীকে সমগ্র বিশ্বের মাতা পিতা হিসেবে কল্পনা করা হয়েছে। ঋকবেদে দেবী হিসেবে উল্লেখ পাওয়া যায় উষাদেবীর। বৈদিক সূক্তগুলিতে উষাদেবীকে প্রণয়িনী যুবতী রূপে কল্পনা করা হয়েছে। বেদে পৃথিবীকে জননী হিসেবে উল্লেখ করা হয়েছে। পৃথিবীর উপর নারীত্ব আরোপ করার ফলে পৃথিবীকে জননী রূপে ভাববার একটা ধারা তৈরি হয়েছে।

নারী প্রজনন ক্ষমতার অধিকারী। সন্তান জন্মদান করে সে। আবার একই রকম ভাবে কৃষিসভ্যতায় মানুষ লক্ষ্য করেছে যে শস্য উৎপন্ন হয় পৃথিবী থেকে। একদিকে পৃথিবী থেকে উৎপাদিত হয় শস্য অন্যদিকে নারীর দেহকে আশ্রয় করে বেড়ে ওঠে সন্তান। এই বোধ পৃথিবী ও নারীকে এক করে ভাবতে শিখিয়েছে। পৃথিবীতে আরোপিত হয়েছে নারীত্ব। ঋকবেদে আকাশ ও পৃথিবীকে জগতের পিতা ও মাতা বলে উল্লেখ করা হয়েছে যাকে দ্যাবাপৃথিবী বলা যায়। যখনই পৃথিবীতে আরোপিত হয়েছে নারীত্ব তখন থেকেই শস্য সংক্রান্ত উর্বরতার সাথে তুলনীয় হয়েছে নারীর গর্ভাবস্থা। এভাবেই গড়ে উঠেছে উর্বরতা কেন্দ্রিক কাল্ট। এই কাল্টের ধারায় পরবর্তীকালে বিভিন্ন আচার অনুষ্ঠান প্রাধান্য পেয়েছে। এই উর্বরতা কেন্দ্রিক কাল্টের উল্লেখ দেখা গেছে হরপ্পা ও মহেঞ্জোদারোর সভ্যতাতেও। সেখানে প্রাপ্ত শিলমোহরে দেখা গেছে নারীর ছবি। যে নারীর যোনি থেকে শস্য উৎপাদিত হওয়ার চিত্র দেখতে পাওয়া যায়। কৃষিকাজ আবিষ্কৃত হওয়ার পর পৃথিবী কল্পিত হলেন নারী রূপে। পৃথিবীর উপর এই নারীত্ব আরোপ করার ধারা লক্ষ্য করা গেছে পৃথিবীর প্রায় সমস্ত দেশেই। পৃথিবীর বিভিন্ন দেশের আদিম জাতিগুলির বিশ্বাসে ও ধর্মধারায় প্রকৃতিকে নারী হিসেবে ভাবার প্রবণতা বিদ্যমান। নারীর উর্বরাশক্তি ও প্রকৃতির উর্বরাশক্তিকে এক করে দেখা হয়েছে। সেজন্যই আমাদের পূজা পার্বণের ধারায় সেটি অনুসৃত হয়েছে। কৃষি সংক্রান্ত উৎসবের প্রতীক মেলে গণেশ পূজার আদি রূপটির মধ্যেও। গণেশ পূজা অনুষ্ঠিত হয় ভাদ্র মাসের পঞ্চমী তিথিতে। চতুর্থী তিথিতে উদযাপিত হয়ে পঞ্চমী তিথিতেই বিসর্জন। এই পঞ্চমীতে বিসর্জনের পর ষষ্ঠী থেকে শুরু হয় আরেকটি পার্বণ যেখানে আগমন ঘটে গৌরী দেবীর। এই গৌরী দেবীর কাছে শস্যের প্রার্থনা জানানো হয়। গণেশ পূজার অঙ্গ হিসেবে যে সমস্ত বস্তু

বা সামগ্রী দেওয়া হয় তার মধ্যে উল্লেখযোগ্য নারকেল, পায়েস, বাতাসা, গুড়। কিছু ক্ষেত্রে গণেশের হাতে থাকে- পদ্ম, পূর্ণকুম্ভ, কল্পকলতা, ধানের শীষ আর ডালিম। এই উপকরণগুলির দিকে খেয়াল রাখলে দেখা যায় একদিকে যেমন নারকেল উর্বরাশক্তির প্রতীক তেমনি অন্যদিকে ডালিমও উর্বরাশক্তির প্রতীক। এই ডালিম তাৎপর্যবাহী কারণ এটি রক্তবর্ণ বহুবীজ ফল। বিভিন্ন দেশের দেবীদের হাতে এই ডালিম ফল দেখা যায়। যেমন- গ্রিক দেবী ডিমিটার, রোমান দেবী ইথিনা। এই ডালিমের লালরং ঋতুরক্তের ইঙ্গিতবাহী যা আসলে উর্বরাশক্তিকেই দ্যোতিত করে। নারীর ঋতুরক্তের সঙ্গে সাদৃশ্য থাকায় ডালিমকে উর্বরা শক্তির প্রতীক রূপে দ্যোতিত করা হয়। শস্য দেবতার আবাহনের সাথে এভাবেই মিশে যাচ্ছে নারীর উর্বরতা।

নারীর উর্বরাশক্তির দ্যোতনা এসেছে পৃথিবীর উপর। তাই নারী সংক্রান্ত আচার অনুষ্ঠানের প্রয়োগ ঘটেছে পৃথিবীর উপর। সেই সংক্রান্ত একটি অনুষ্ঠান- ডাক সংক্রান্তি। সাধারণত, বাঙালি সমাজে নারীর সন্তান জন্মের পূর্বে সাধ ভক্ষণ করানো হয়। এক্ষেত্রেও সেই রীতির অনুসরণ দেখতে পাওয়া যায়। আশ্বিন মাসের সংক্রান্তির দিন এই রীতি পালিত হয়। এই সংক্রান্তি আসলে সূর্যের সংক্রমণের রীতি। প্রাচীন জ্যোতির্বিজ্ঞান অনুযায়ী সূর্য বারো মাসে বারোটি রাশিতে অবস্থান করে। দৈনিক হিসেব অনুযায়ী সূর্য প্রতিদিন এক ডিগ্রি করে সরে যায়। এমনি করে প্রতিদিন এক ডিগ্রি করে সরতে সরতে, ত্রিশ দিনের দিন, এক রাশি থেকে অন্য রাশিতে স্থানান্তরিত হয়। সূর্যের একরাশি থেকে অন্য রাশিতে স্থানান্তরের দিনটিই সংক্রান্তি। যেকোনো আচার অনুষ্ঠানের পক্ষে এই দিনটি গুরুত্বপূর্ণ। এই সৌরপঞ্জি ব্যবহৃত হয়েছে অধিকাংশ আচারের ক্ষেত্রে। ডাক সংক্রান্তির ক্ষেত্রেও আশ্বিন মাসের সংক্রান্তির দিনটিকে নির্বাচিত করা হয়েছে। পশ্চিমবঙ্গের উত্তর ২৪ পরগনা জেলার, বিস্তীর্ণ অঞ্চল জুড়ে এই রীতি পালিত হয়। সংক্রান্তির দিন বিকেল থেকেই এই আচারের আয়োজন শুরু হয়। এই আচার আসলে পৃথিবীকে নারীর প্রতিভূ মনে করে তাকে সাধ ভক্ষণ করানোর রীতি। গৃহস্থ চাষিরবাড়িতে বিকেল থেকেই এই আয়োজন শুরু হয়। কালো কচুপাতা কেটে ধুয়ে রাখা হয়। যে কুলোতে সাধের উপকরণ রাখা হয় সেটি পরিষ্কার করে রাখা হয় বিকেলেই। সংক্রান্তির দিন ভোরবেলা বাড়ির গৃহবধূ পরিষ্কার পোশাক পরিধান করেন। শঙ্খ বাজিয়ে ও উলুধ্বনির মাধ্যমে কুলোর সামনে প্রথমে সিঁদুরের ফোঁটা দেওয়া হয়। তারপর দেওয়া হয় চন্দনের ফোঁটা শেষে কলাপাতার গোড়ার দিকের মোটা অংশে প্রদীপের কালি থেকে কাজল তৈরি করে তার ফোঁটা দেওয়া হয়। এই সিঁদুর লালরং বা রক্তবর্ণের দ্যোতনা বহন করে। এই সিঁদুর সধবা নারীর ইঙ্গিতবাহী। এই লালরং নারীর ঋতুরক্তের পরিচায়ক, যার জন্য নারী সন্তান ধারণের অধিকারী। এই রক্তবর্ণ বা রক্তচিহ্নের সঙ্গে বিবাহের অনুষ্ঠানের যোগ দেখতে পাওয়া যায়। এই রক্তবর্ণ সিঁদুর দিয়ে আসলে নারীটিকে নির্দিষ্ট করে দেওয়া হয় কোন একটি পুরুষের সন্তান ধারণ করার জন্য। উর্বরাশক্তির প্রতীক সিঁদুর। এর লাল রং পবিত্র। আমাদের দেশে বিভিন্ন পূজার ক্ষেত্রে তাই দেখা যায় এই সিঁদুরের ব্যবহার। অন্যদিকে চন্দন পবিত্রতার ইঙ্গিতবাহী। তাই দেওয়া হয় চন্দনের ফোঁটা। আর কাজল গর্ভবতী নারীকে সমস্ত অশুভ শক্তির থেকে দূরে রাখে। তাই কাজলের ফোঁটা দেওয়া হয়। এই তিন সারি ফোঁটা

দেওয়ার পর সাধের উপকরণ হিসেবে দেওয়া হয় পাকাকলা, কাঁচা তেঁতুল, আখ,কাঁচা হলুদ, পোড়ামাটি, শুকিয়ে যাওয়া তালের আটির নরম শাঁস, বাতাসা, তুলসী পাতা। সাধের উপকরণে ব্যবহৃত কলা উর্বরা শক্তির প্রতীক। যেকোন শুভ আচারে কাঁচা হলুদের ব্যবহার লক্ষণীয়, সেই সূত্রেই এসেছে হলুদের ব্যবহার। কাঁচা তেঁতুল- অম্ল জাতীয়, যা গর্ভবতী নারীর উপাদেয় খাদ্য রূপে বিবেচিত। এই উপকরণগুলি কচুপাতায় মুড়ে নতুন পাটের আঁশ দিয়ে বেঁধে দেওয়া হয়। প্রতিটি কচুপাতায় সিঁদুর, কাজল ও চন্দনের ফোঁটা দিতে হয়। সাধারণত গ্রামাঞ্চলে কোন একটি চাষী গৃহস্থবাড়িতে এই আয়োজন হয়। অন্যরা সেই বাড়ি থেকে সংগ্রহ করে নিয়ে যান। পরীক্ষার করে রাখা নতুন পাটকাঠির মাথায় এই কচুপাতায় মোড়া সাধ বেঁধে দেওয়া হয়। এরপর বাড়ির চাষী গৃহস্থ পরিকৃত ধুতি পরিধান করে আর একটি ধুতি গায়ে জড়িয়ে একমুঠো পাটকাঠি হাতে নিয়ে বাস্তুভিটার কোণে পাটকাঠিতে আগুন ধরিয়ে এই ছড়াটি আবৃত্তি করেন-

লক্ষ্মীর পূর্বে
পাটকাঠি আলো দে,
এক গোলা শস্য নে,
এক গোলা ধান নে,
এক জোড়া হাল বলদ নে,
এই পথ দিয়ে এসো গো।

বসতবাড়ির কোণে, ঘরের চালে কচুপাতায় মোড়া সাধ রাখা হয়। চাষের জমিতে, বাড়ির গোলায়, খড়ের গাদায় রেখে আসা হতো সাধ। এই পর্ব সমাপা হলে ভোরবেলা পাড়ার ছেলেমেয়েরা হাতে কুলো নিয়ে রাস্তায় বসে কুলো বাজাতে বাজাতে এই ছড়াটি আবৃত্তি করতো -

আশ্বিন যায় কার্তিক আসে
মা লক্ষ্মী গর্ভে বসে,
গর্ভে বসে সাধ খাও বর দাও গো।
এই বাড়ির পোকামাকড় ওই বাড়ি যা,
হরিণ শেয়াল খেয়ে গেল যুদ্ধ লেগে যা ।

এই পার্বণ ও এই ছড়ার উল্লেখ করেছেন ড. বরুণ কুমার চক্রবর্তী ‘বঙ্গীয় লোকসংস্কৃতি কোষ’ গ্রন্থে। তবে এই ছড়াটির একটু পরিবর্তিত রূপ উল্লেখিত আছে গ্রন্থটিতে-

‘ আশ্বিন যায় কার্তিক আসে
মা লক্ষ্মী গর্ভে বসে
সাধ খাও বর দাও হে-
আমাদের বাড়ির পোকামাকড় ওদের বাড়ি যা
হরিণ শেয়াল খেয়ে গেল দুর্জয় দুর্জয়।’

উত্তর ২৪ পরগনা জেলার ইছামতি নদীর এক পারের মানুষ অর্থাৎ এক অঞ্চলের মানুষ এই রীতি অনুসরণ করেন। মূলত হাসনাবাদ ব্লকের অন্তর্ভুক্ত চাষাবাদের অঞ্চলে দেখা গেছে এমন রীতিপদ্ধতি। আবার ইছামতির অপরপারে বাদুরিয়া অঞ্চলে এই আচারের পরিবর্তন লক্ষিত হয়েছে। সেখানে এই কার্তিক মাসের সংক্রান্তির দিন শুদ্ধ বস্ত্রে, শুদ্ধ আচারে পিঠেপুলি খাওয়ার রীতি পরিলক্ষিত হয়। তাছাড়াও ভোরে উঠে সাধের উপকরণ হিসেবে চালগুড়ো করে জলে মিশিয়ে, সেই জলে সিঁদুর, কাজল, চন্দন মিশিয়ে সেটি চাষের জমিতে ছড়িয়ে দেওয়ার রীতি প্রচলিত। বাঙালি সমাজে গর্ভবতী নারীকে সাত মাসে সাধ ভক্ষণ করানো রীতি। এই আচারের ক্ষেত্রে দেখা যায় সাত মাসের সঙ্গে সাযুজ্য রেখে সাত রকমের ফল, সাত রকমের মিষ্টি, সাত রকম আচার, সাত রকম রান্না করা সবজি, ও পায়ের খাওয়ানো হয়। তার পূর্বে ওই দম্পতিকে স্নান করানো হয়। স্নানের পর নববস্ত্র পরিধান করে, নতুন মালা, ঘুনসি পরিয়ে বরণ করা হয়। এই বরণডালায় রাখা হয় – পাঁচটি এয়ো ঘট, যার প্রতিটি গর্ভ থাকে ধান্য পূর্ণ। একছড়া কলা রাখা হয়। এছাড়া থাকে ধান, দূর্বা। সিঁদুর, কাজল, চন্দন রাখা হয় বরণডালার কুলোতে আর রাখা হয় প্রদীপের আলো। ধান সমৃদ্ধির ও দূর্বা সুদীর্ঘ জীবনের প্রতীক। ধান ও দূর্বা দিয়ে আশীর্বাদ করার অর্থ সমৃদ্ধশালী ও দীর্ঘজীবনের অধিকারী হওয়ার জন্য কামনা জানানো। বরণডালায় রাখা কলাও উর্বরা শক্তির প্রতীক। আশীর্বাদের পর গর্ভবতী নারীকে সাত রকমের খাবার খাওয়ানো হয়। এভাবে সমাপন হয় সাধ ভক্ষণ রীতি। অঞ্চল অনুযায়ী এই রীতির প্রকারভেদ দেখতে পাওয়া যায়।

ডাক সংক্রান্তি পালিত হওয়ার সময়কাল আশ্বিন মাসের সংক্রান্তির দিন। এই সময়কালের দিকে লক্ষ্য রাখলে দেখা যায় যে, কার্তিক মাস আদতে আমন ধানের সময়কাল। আমন ধান শীতকালীন। জুন বা জুলাই মাস থেকে ডিসেম্বর পর্যন্ত এই ধানের সময়কাল। ধানের জীবনচক্র কমবেশি একশো থেকে একশো কুড়ি দিন। এই জীবনচক্রের তিনটি পর্যায় - অঙ্গজকাল, জননকাল ও দানাপুষ্টিকাল। ধানের বীজ ছড়ানো থেকে শুরু করে অঙ্কুরোদগম এবং গাছের বেড়ে ওঠা পর্ব অর্থাৎ শৈশবকাল, সেটিকেই অঙ্গজ পর্যায়ের অন্তর্ভুক্ত করা হয়। এই পর্যায়ে ধানগাছ বৃদ্ধি পায় ও ধানগাছ থেকে পাশকাঠি বেরোয়। এই পাশকাঠি বেরনোর পর্ব চলে চব্বিশ থেকে বিয়াল্লিশ দিন সময়কাল পর্যন্ত। অঙ্গজ পর্বের পর ধানগাছে যখন শীষমুকুল দেখা দেয় এই পর্বটিকে বলা হয় জনন পর্ব। শীষমুকুল দেখা দেওয়ার পঁচিশ দিন পর গাছে ফুল আসে। জনন পর্বে থাকে- কোষ বিভাজন, পরাগ সংযোগ ও নিষিক্তিকরণ। উনিশ থেকে পঁচিশ দিন পর্যন্ত এই পর্ব স্থায়ী হয়। ধানগাছে ফুল ফোটার পর আসে দানাপুষ্টি পর্ব, যেখানে মূলত ধানের মধ্যকার দুধ অংশ ধীরে ধীরে পুষ্টি পেতে থাকে। একেবারে শুরুতে থাকে পাতলা দুধের মত তরল। এই তরল ধীরে ধীরে ঘন হয়ে পুষ্ট হতে থাকে। ধান রোয়া থেকে শুরু করে চল্লিশ দিন পর শীষমুকুল হতে দেখা যায়। মুকুল হওয়ার পঁচিশ দিন পর ধানের ফুল ফোটে। ফুল ফোটা থেকে শুরু করে পঁচিশ দিনের মধ্যে দানাপুষ্টি হয়। কার্তিক মাস ধান কাটার মরশুম। এই মরশুমের আগে যখন দানাপুষ্টি পর্ব চলে ওই সময় সংক্রান্তির আচার পালন করা হয়। ঠিক

যেমন, গর্ভবতী নারীকে সাত মাসে সাধ ভক্ষণ করানোর আচার প্রচলিত আছে। গ্রাম্য পরিভাষায় একে ডাক সাঁকরানিও বলা হয়। এই আমন ধানের মধ্যে পড়ে- বাদকলমকাটি, চূর্ণকাটি, নাগরা, ভাসামানিক, রূপশাল, ঝাঙাশাল, কলমা, দুধসর, তিলককাচারি, করিমশাল, কালান্তি, বাগতুলশি, পাটনাই, লাউতি, আছড়া ও কুমড়াগোড় চাল।

উল্লিখিত পার্বণটির মৌখিক ছড়ার দিকে লক্ষ্য রাখলে দেখা যায় যে, সেখানে দেবী লক্ষ্মীকে আবাহন করা হচ্ছে। সভ্যতার শুরুর পর্বে ধরিত্রীকে নারী রূপে ভাবা হয়েছে। ধরিত্রীকে নারী ভেবেই তাঁর উপরে যাবতীয় নারীত্ব আরোপিত হয়েছে ও সেই সংক্রান্ত যাবতীয় আচার পালন করা হয়েছে। এখানে পৃথিবী বা ধরিত্রী মাতার রূপ আরোপিত হয়েছে দেবী লক্ষ্মীর উপর। লক্ষ্মী দেবীর আবির্ভাবের ইতিহাসের দিকে নজর রাখলে দেখা যায় যে, ঋকবেদে এই দেবীর কোন উল্লেখই নেই। সেখানে কেবল উষাদেবীর উল্লেখ পাওয়া গেছে। ঋকবেদের অর্বাচীনকালে লিখিত যে অখিলসূক্ত সেখানে লক্ষ্মী দেবীর উল্লেখ পাওয়া গেছে। যদিও এটি অনেক পরবর্তীকালের। এখানে দেবী সুবর্ণবর্ণা ও রজতমাল্যধারিণী। ঋকবেদ ছাড়া দেবী লক্ষ্মীর যে উল্লেখ পাওয়া গেছে, সেখানে দেখা যায় যে তিনি মূলত সৌন্দর্যের দেবী। প্রথমদিকে শ্রী ও লক্ষ্মী নামে আলাদা দেবীর অস্তিত্ব পাওয়া গেছে। এই শ্রী সম্পদ বা শোভার দেবী আর লক্ষ্মী সৌন্দর্যের দেবী। বিভিন্ন গ্রন্থে শ্রী ও লক্ষ্মীর আলাদা অস্তিত্ব বর্ণিত হয়েছে। তৈত্তিরীয় উপনিষদে, শতপথ ব্রাহ্মণে, বৌদ্ধায়নের ধর্মসূত্রে শ্রী ও লক্ষ্মীর উল্লেখ আছে। সেখানে সম্পদের দেবী হিসেবে প্রাধান্য পেয়েছেন শ্রী। পরবর্তীকালে আদিত্য পত্নী রূপে শ্রী ও লক্ষ্মীর উল্লেখ পাওয়া গেছে। ভাগবতেও শ্রীর আলাদা উল্লেখ পাওয়া গেছে। পরবর্তীকালে শ্রী ও লক্ষ্মী এক হয়ে মিশ্রিত হয়েছেন। ক্রমে লক্ষ্মী হলেন সম্পদ ও সৌভাগ্যের দেবী। সম্পদের দেবী হওয়ায় তিনি সাধারণের পূজা লাভ করলেন। সম্পদের শ্রী বর্ধিত হয়ে তার সৌভাগ্য সমস্ত কিছুতে বর্ধিত হল। ভারতবর্ষ কৃষিপ্রধান দেশ। কৃষিই সেখানে সম্পদ। কৃষিকাজের অন্যতম প্রধান ফসল ধান। তাই দেবী লক্ষ্মীর হাতে শোভা পেয়েছে ধান। ভারতবর্ষে এসময় সম্পদ বলে বিবেচিত হয়েছে ধান। ধান্যরূপা লক্ষ্মীকে বন্দনা করা হয়েছে এখানে। একদিকে যেমন, শ্রী সম্পদ বা শোভার দেবী ছিলেন, তিনি লক্ষ্মী দেবীর সাথে মিশে গেছেন কালক্রমে, তেমনি অন্যদিকে বসুধা বা বসুন্ধরা বা পৃথিবীদেবীও মিশে গেছেন দেবী লক্ষ্মীর সত্তায়। কৃষিপ্রধান এই দেশে তাই লক্ষ্মীর অনুষঙ্গে এসেছে পাটকাঠি, গোলা ও বলদের প্রসঙ্গ। প্রতিটি বস্তুই কৃষির সাথে ওতপ্রোতভাবে জড়িত। গোলায় রাখা হয় সম্বৎসরের ধান। প্রাণধারণের অন্যতম প্রধান উপায় হিসেবে। চাষের ক্ষেত্রে হাল-বলদ অত্যন্ত প্রয়োজনীয়। তাই এই প্রয়োজনীয় সামগ্রীগুলির প্রতি প্রার্থনা জানানো হয়েছে এই আচারে। বৌদ্ধতন্ত্রে এই বসুধারা দেবীর উল্লেখ পাওয়া যায়, যেখানে তাঁর হাতে ধানের শীষ লক্ষিত হয়েছে। বসুধারা দেবীর হাতের এই ধানের শীষ কালক্রমে সম্পদের দেবী লক্ষ্মীর হস্তগত হয়েছে। সম্পদ ও সৌভাগ্যের দেবী লক্ষ্মী হয়ে উঠেছেন শস্যের দেবী। তাই তাঁর কাছেই মানুষ প্রার্থনা জানিয়েছে শস্যের উৎপাদনের। চেয়েছে দেবীকে সাধ ভক্ষণ করিয়ে তাঁকে তুষ্ট করে ফসল অর্থাৎ সৌভাগ্যের ও সমৃদ্ধির অধিকারী হতে।

এই পার্বণটিতে বাঙালির সমাজ জীবনের একটি ছবি যেন স্পষ্ট হয়ে ওঠে। আশ্বিন মাসের সংক্রান্তি অর্থাৎ সেই সময় শীতের আনাগোনা শুরু। শীতের ভোরে উঠে শস্য ও সম্পদের দেবী লক্ষ্মীকে আবাহন করা। সেই আবাহনের অঙ্গ হিসেবে পাড়ার সমস্ত ছেলেমেয়ের একসাথে ছড়া আবৃত্তি করতে করতে কুলো বাজানো গ্রামের রাস্তায় বসে। আবার কুলো বাজানো হয়ে গেলে কুলো ধুয়ে বাড়ি ফিরে আসা। কার্তিক মাস ফসল কাটার মাস। এই পার্বণের কিছুদিন পর ফসল কাটা হবে। এই ফসল বা শস্যই সম্পদ রূপে বিবেচিত হয়। গোলাভরা ধান উঠবে কৃষকের অঙ্গনে। যা কিছুটা সৌভাগ্য বয়ে আনে গ্রামীণ কৃষকের জীবনে। এই সৌভাগ্য ও সচ্ছলতার স্বপ্ন দেখে সাধারণ কৃষক। সাধারণের সৌভাগ্য সূচক সেই প্রার্থনাই এসেছে এই পার্বণটিতে। হাল-বলদ নিয়ে গোলাভরা ধান ও শস্যের প্রার্থনা জানিয়েছে কৃষক। দেবী লক্ষ্মীকে সাধ ভক্ষণ করিয়েছে। পৃথিবীর উপর মানবীত্ব আরোপ করে মাতৃকাশক্তির আরাধনা আসলে বহু প্রাচীন এক অনার্য সভ্যতার ধারা বহন করে চলেছে। এই ধারা বাহিত ‘বঙ্গ’ শব্দের মধ্যেও। শব্দটিতে অস্ট্রিক ভাষার প্রভাব প্রবল। ‘বঙ্গ’ শব্দ এসেছে কোল শব্দ ‘বোঙা’ থেকে, যার অর্থ দেবভূমি। বঙ্গদেশের সাধারণ কৃষকের জীবনের আকাঙ্ক্ষা ও প্রাচীন মাতৃতান্ত্রিক সভ্যতার রূপ প্রতিফলিত এই পার্বণটিতে।

তথ্যসূত্র

- ১। চট্টোপাধ্যায় দেবীপ্রসাদ, লোকায়ত দর্শন, ১৩৬৩, নিউ এজ পাবলিশার্স প্রাইভেট লিমিটেড।
- ২।, সেনগুপ্ত পল্লব, পূজা পার্বণের উৎসকথা, ১৯৫৯, পুস্তক বিপণি।
- ৩। ভট্টাচার্য হংস নারায়ণ, হিন্দুদের দেবদেবী : উদ্ভব ও ক্রমবিকাশ(তৃতীয় পর্ব), ফার্মা কে এল এম প্রাইভেট লিমিটেড।
- ৪। ঠাকুর অবনীন্দ্রনাথ, বাংলার ব্রত, পৌষ ১৪০২, বিশ্বভারতী।
- ৫। ড. চট্টোপাধ্যায় বিশ্বনাথ ও ড. মাইতি বিশ্বনাথ, ধান উৎপাদন, প্রথম প্রকাশ: জুন ১৯৮৪, পশ্চিমবঙ্গ রাজ্য পুস্তক পর্ষৎ।
- ৬।, ভট্টাচার্য বিষ্ণুপদ, বৈদিক দেবতা, ১৩৫৭ মাঘ, বিশ্বভারতী।
- ৭।, সম্পাঃ ড. চক্রবর্তী বরুণ কুমার, বঙ্গীয় লোকসংস্কৃতি কোষ, ২০১৬, দে বুক স্টোর।



লোকসংগ্রহ রূপী কর্ম রহস্য

Lōkasaṅgraha: The Secret of Collective Welfare

Uday Sarkar, PhD

Assistant Professor

Department of Philosophy

Seth Soorajmull Jalan Girls' College

Kolkata, West Bengal, India

Email: udaysarkar2@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper reveals the secret of liberation from the bondage generated by human actions, emphasizing 'Lokasangraha', through selfless action for societal good, nation-building, and civic duty, embodying Vedic ideals like 'Krinvanto Vishvam Aryam' and 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam'. The entire article is written in four parts, where alongside detailed consideration, analysis, and review, the utility and objectives of 'Lokasangraha' in society have been determined. An attempt has been made to observe this in the context of ancient times and scriptures (Vedas, Philosophy, Upanishads, Gita, and Mahabhashya) and modern society. Furthermore, the significance of human life is realized through the determination of human duty and actions.



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প্রামুখ্য:

লোকসংগ্রহ কর্ম ব্যক্তিকে জন্ম-মরণের সার্বভৌম চক্র থেকে আত্যন্তিক নিবৃত্তি মোক্ষ বা মুক্তি প্রদানে সক্ষম। ভগবান শ্রী কৃষ্ণ অমর গ্রন্থ শ্রীমদ্ভগবতগীতায় অর্জুন কে উপদেশ প্রদান করে বলেছিলেন। ভগবানের শ্রীমুখ থেকে নির্গত উপদেশের অভিপ্রায় হলো যে- মানুষ কর্মবন্ধনে অনিবার্যরূপে বিবশ। অর্থাৎ প্রয়োজনে- অপ্রয়োজনে মানুষ কে কর্ম করতেই হবে। কিন্তু অনাসক্ত ভাবনায় কৃত কর্ম কেবলমাত্র কর্ম না হয়ে কর্মযোগে পরিণত হয়ে যায়। তখন কর্ম-বন্ধন দৃঢ় না হয়ে বন্ধনই শিথিল হয়ে যায়। পশ্চাতে মুক্তির মার্গ অবিরতভাবে প্রশস্ত হয়ে যায়। কর্মের এই কর্মযোগকে শ্রীমদ্ভগবতগীতায় যজ্ঞের সংজ্ঞায় ভূষিত করেছেন। গীতাতে বলা হয়েছে –

যজ্ঞার্থং কর্মণঃ অন্যত্র লোকঃ অয়ং কর্ম বন্ধনঃ। গীতা -3/9

অতএব জিজ্ঞাসা উৎপন্ন হওয়া স্বাভাবিক যে লোকসংগ্রহ কী ? লোকসংগ্রহের বাস্তবিক অভিপ্রায়কে জানতে অধিকাংশ বিদ্বানগণ ভ্রমিত হয়ে পড়েন। তাঁহারা অধিকাংশ সময় লৌকিক অভ্যুদয় প্রাপ্তি হেতু যজ্ঞ, তপস্যা, দান ইত্যাদি কর্ম কে লোকসংগ্রহ রূপে মনে করে থাকেন বা ইহাদিগকেই লোকসংগ্রহ প্রাপ্তির একমাত্র মার্গ হিসেবে পরিগণিত করে থাকেন। কিন্তু ইহা লোকসংগ্রহের কদাপি অভিপ্রায় নহে। লোকসংগ্রহের অভিপ্রায় হলো –

লোকস্য উন্মার্গ প্রবৃত্তি নিবারনং লোকসংগ্রহঃ। শ্রীমদ্ভগবতগীতার শঙ্কর ভাষ্য -3/20

অর্থাৎ কু-মার্গে যাওয়ার প্রবৃত্তি থেকে লোকেদের বিরত রাখার নামই হলো **লোকসংগ্রহ**। অভিপ্রায় হলো যে এহেন কর্ম করে যেন শিক্ষা হয় যে অশুভ কর্মের ফল যেন অবশ্যই অশুভ হয়। পাপীদের বিনাশ অবশ্যই হয়ে থাকে তথা আততায়ীরা অবশ্যই বধ্য হয়ে থাকে। এই কথাটি বার- বার অর্জুনকে বোঝানো হয়েছে - যে তুমি পাপীদের দণ্ড প্রদান হেতু যুদ্ধ করো, স্ত্রী জাতির অপমানকারী শক্তির বিনাশ হেতু যুদ্ধ করো। স্বীয় ভ্রাতার অধিকার হননকারী - কুলঘাতী পুরুষ সदैব দণ্ড যোগ্যই হয়, গুরুজনদের অপমানকারী কৌরবদের নৈতিক শিক্ষা প্রদান হেতু সংহার করো। এরূপ নিষ্কাম ভাবনায় লোকসংগ্রহ হেতু কৃত কর্মকে লোকসংগ্রহ রূপে পরিগণিত হয়। রাজর্ষি জনক, মহর্ষি বিশ্বামিত্র, মহর্ষি বশিষ্ঠ প্রভৃতি ঋষিদের দ্বারা কৃত কর্ম কখনো স্বার্থ সিদ্ধির জন্য নহে। কারণ তাঁহারা তো আশুতাম, প্রাপ্তপ্রাপণীয় এবং বিদিতবেদিতব্য পুরুষ ছিলেন। কোনোকিছু করা তাঁহাদের জন্য বাকি ছিল না। এতদসত্ত্বেও তাঁহারা কর্ম করে গেছেন, কারণ কর্ম ছিল তাঁহাদের কর্তব্য। কর্তব্য-কর্মই তো হলো কর্মযোগ। এই কারণেই প্রাচীন ঋষিদের কর্ম কে লোকসংগ্রহ বা লোকানুগ্রহ বলা হয়ে থাকে। আচার্য অভিনব এই কথাটি গীতার্থ সংগ্রহে প্রতিপাদিত করে বলেছেন –

প্রাপ্ত প্রাপণীয়স্য পরিপূর্ণমনসো অপি

কর্মপ্রবৃত্তৌ লোকানুগ্রহঃ প্রয়োজনম। 3/21

লোকসংগ্রহ শব্দটি সর্বপ্রথম গীতার মধ্যে বহুল প্রচলিত দৃষ্টিগোচর হয়। যেমন –

কর্মণৈব হি সংসিদ্ধিমাশ্চি জ্ঞানকাদয়ঃ।

লোকসংগ্রহমেবাপি সমপশ্যন কর্তুমর্হসি। 3/20

অর্থাৎ হে অর্জুন ! প্রাচীনকালে জনকাদি ঋষিগণ এতই সিদ্ধি প্রাপ্ত করেছিলেন যে অন্যান্য ঋষিগণও তাঁদের কাছে জ্ঞান লাভের জন্য আগমন করতেন। জনকাদি ঋষিগণ এই সিদ্ধি কর্মযোগের মাধ্যমেই প্রাপ্ত করেছিলেন। কর্মযোগের এই ভাবনাকেই লোকসংগ্রহ ভাবনা বলেই পরিভাষিত করা হয়, যাহা সকল মানবের জন্য প্রযোজ্য। উদাহরণস্বরূপ বলা যেতে পারে যে ব্রাহ্মণ, ক্ষত্রিয়, বৈশ্য তথা শূদ্র যদি স্বধর্ম ভুলে পরধর্মের নির্ধারিত বৈশিষ্ট্য তথা কর্ম করে থাকে, তাহলে সৃষ্টির

গতিশীলতা হ্রাস পেয়ে বিনাশকে প্রাপ্ত হতে বেশি সময় লাগবেনা। গীতা স্থিত কর্ম মীমাংসার এই ব্যাখ্যা অত্যন্ত সরলভাবে নিরূপণ করা হয়েছে। যদিও মহর্ষি জৈমিনি লোকসংগ্রহের এই ব্যাখ্যা সহস্রবর্ষ পূর্বে প্রদান করেছিলেন, কিন্তু সময়ান্তরালে বৌদ্ধিক ক্ষমতা হ্রাস পাওয়ায় জনপ্রিয়তা লাভ করতে সক্ষম হয়নি। মহর্ষি জৈমিনি স্পষ্ট ভাষায় বলেছেন –

আত্মায়স্য ক্রিয়ার্থত্বাদ আনর্থক্যমতদর্থানাং। মীমাংসা সূত্র- ১/২১.

অর্থাৎ বেদের মূখ্য প্রয়োজন হলো কর্মযোগের প্রতিপাদন করা। কারণ কর্মহীন জ্ঞান প্রতিপাদক বাক্য নিরর্থক। কর্ম শব্দ যজ্ঞ অর্থে ব্যবহৃত হলেও সমস্ত কর্মই যজ্ঞের স্বরূপ হিসেবে বিবেচিত। যজ্ঞ শব্দের অভিপ্রায় হলো দেবতাদের উদ্দেশ্যে দ্রব্যত্যাগ, মহর্ষি জৈমিনির এই অর্থের সরল ব্যাখ্যা করে মহর্ষি কৃষ্ণ দ্বৈপায়ন **যজ্ঞ-চক্রের** উপাদেয়তাকে স্বীকার করে গীতায় উপদেশ দিয়েছেন-

সহযজ্ঞাঃ প্রজাঃ সৃষ্টা পুরোবাচ প্রজাপতিঃ।

অনেন প্রসবিষ্য ধ্বংসমেঘ ব অস্তিষ্ট কামধুক্ ॥ ৩/১০

দেবান্ ভাবযতানেন তে দেবা ভাবযন্ত বঃ।

পরম্পরং ভাবযন্তঃ শ্রেয়ঃ পরম ব্যাক্যথ ॥ ৩/১১

ইষ্টান্ ভোগান্ হি বো দেবা দাস্যন্তে যজ্ঞভাবিতাঃ।

তৈরদত্তান প্রদাযৈভ্য যো ভুজ্ঞেস্তেন এব সঃ ॥ ৩/১২

যজ্ঞশিষ্টা শিনঃ সন্তো মুচ্যন্তে সর্বকিঞ্চিষৈঃ।

ভুঞ্জতে তে ত্বঘং পাপা পচন্ত্য আত্মকারণাং ॥ ৩/১৩

অনাদ্ ভবন্তি ভূতানি পর্জন্যাদ্ অনসম্ভবঃ।

যজ্ঞাদ্ ভবতি পর্জন্য যজ্ঞঃ কর্মসমুদ্ভবঃ ॥ ৩/১৪

কর্ম ব্রহ্মোদ্ভবং বিদ্ধি ব্রহ্মাক্ষরসমুদ্ভবম্।

তস্মাৎ সর্বগতং ব্রহ্ম নিত্যং যজ্ঞে প্রতিষ্ঠিতম্ ॥ ৩/১৫

এবং প্রবর্তিতং চক্রং নানুবর্তয়তীহ যঃ।

অঘায়ুরীন্দ্রিয়ারামো মোঘং পার্থ স জীবতি ॥ ৩/১৬

অর্থাৎ এই চক্রে অন্য হইতে ব্রহ্ম পর্যন্ত সকল পদার্থ একসূত্রে অনসূত রয়েছে। কিন্তু গীতায় যজ্ঞের প্রয়োগ অত্যন্ত ব্যাপক অর্থে করা হয়েছে। যজ্ঞ অনেক প্রকার। যথা - ১-দ্রব্যযজ্ঞ, ২- তপঃ যজ্ঞ, ৩- জ্ঞানযজ্ঞ, ৪- ব্রহ্ম যজ্ঞ, ৫- দেবযজ্ঞ, ৬- ভূতযজ্ঞ, ৭- নৃ - যজ্ঞ ইত্যাদি -গীতা -৮/১৫-৩২.

সরলার্থে বলা যায় যে ফলাকাঙ্ক্ষার উদ্দেশ্যে কৃত কর্ম বন্ধন উৎপন্ন করে থাকে। এর বিপরীতে অর্থাৎ লোকসংগ্রহে মুক্তাবস্থার কথা পূর্ণরূপে অভিযুক্ত হয়।

লোকসংগ্রহে আধ্যাত্মিকতার চরম উৎকর্ষতা:

মীমাংসা সূত্রে বর্ণিত কর্মযোগকে অত্যন্ত সরল ও সুবোধগম্য করে গীতা প্রচলিত করেন। কারণ মানবের সর্বাঙ্গীণ জীবনের আধার হলো একমাত্র যে- কর্ম। যে কোনো মানব ক্ষণমাত্রের জন্য হলেও কর্মব্যতীত থাকা সম্ভব নহে। প্রকৃতি

স্থিত তিন গুণ -এর সমান অবস্থার নামই হলো প্রকৃতি [সত্বরজস্তমসাং সাম্যাবস্থা প্রকৃতি: - এই অবধারণায় প্রকৃতিস্থ গুণ বলাৎ কর্ম হেতু নিয়তরূপে প্রেরণ করে থাকে। শ্রী মদ্ভগবদগীতায় বলা হয়েছে -

ন হি কশ্চিদক্ষণমপি জাতু তিষ্ঠতি কর্মকৃত্।

কার্যতে হ্যবশঃ কর্ম সর্বঃ প্রকৃতিজৈষ্ঠ্যৈঃ ॥ ৩/৫

কর্মের মধ্যে নিবাস করে থাকে এক প্রকার আসক্তি বা দুর্গুণ। ইহার নাম হলো - বাসনা, ফলাকাজ্জ্ঞা ও আসক্তি ইত্যাদি। কর্মের এই বিষদন্ত কে ভেঙে না ফেলা অবধি কর্মজয় করা সম্ভব নহে। কর্মফল ভোগ নিয়ত, ফলভোগ ব্যতিরেকে কেউ নিঃশ্রেয়স প্রাপ্ত হয়না। কেবলমাত্র লোকসংগ্রহের অভিলাষায় বন্ধন থেকে মুক্তি পেতে পারি। কার্যের এই কুশলতাপূর্বক সম্পাদন যাহা বন্ধন উৎপন্ন করেনা মহর্ষি পতঞ্জলি তাহাকে যোগ বলেছেন।

যোগঃ কর্মসুকৌশলম্ ..যোগসূত্র -

কর্মসম্পাদন থেকে কর্মযোগ উত্তম। শ্রীমদ্ভগবৎগীতায় বলা হয়েছে -

সম্যাসঃ কর্মযোগে নিঃশ্রেয়স করাবুভৌ।

তযন্তু কর্মসম্যাসাৎ কর্মযোগো বিশিষ্যতে। 5/2.

কিন্তু সাধারণ কর্মবাদকে কর্মযোগে প্রবর্তিত করার জন্য তিন প্রকার সোপানের আশ্রয় অবশ্যই প্রয়োজন। সোপান তিনটি হলো -

- ১- কর্মের ফলাকাজ্জ্ঞা বর্জন।
- ২- কর্তৃত্বের অভিমান বর্জন এবং
- ৩- ঈশ্বরে অর্পণ।

এতদ বিষয়ে মহর্ষি কৃষ্ণঃ দ্বৈপায়ন উপদেশ দিয়ে বলেছেন - মানবের অধিকার কেবলমাত্র কর্মে , কর্মফলে নহে। ফলের আকাজ্জ্ঞায় কর্ম করা লোকসংগ্রহে বাধকস্বরূপ। অকর্মে সর্বদা ইচ্ছাহীন থাকা বাঞ্ছনীয়। গীতাকার বলেছেন -

কর্মণ্যেবাধিকারস্তে মা ফলেষু কদাচন।

মা কর্মফলহেতুর্ভূম্মা তে সঙ্গঅস্বকর্মণি। 2/47

লোকসংগ্রহের মার্গে কর্মযোগের ইহাই মহামন্ত্র। গীতার এই শ্লোকে মোট চারটি পদ রয়েছে। এই চারটি পদকেই কর্মযোগের চতুঃসূত্রী বলা হয়ে থাকে। যদিও আসক্তি পরিত্যাগপূর্বক কর্মে নিয়োজিত থাকা মন্দ নহে। গীতার মান্যতা অনুসারে মানবকে কর্মত্যাগ নহে, অপিতু কর্মফলে ত্যাগ বা বর্জন করা উচিত। এই ব্যাখ্যাকেই কিছু পণ্ডিত কাম্যকর্মত্যাগকেই সম্যাস রূপে পরিভাষিত করে থাকে। যেমন -

কাম্যানাং কর্মণাং ন্যাসং সম্যাসং কবয় বিদুঃ।

সর্বকর্মফলত্যাগং প্রাহসত্যগং বিচক্ষণাঃ। 18/2

কর্তাকে কৃতকর্মে কর্তৃত্বাভিমান বর্জন অনিবার্য। কারণ সকল প্রকার জীব ত্রিগুণাত্মিকা প্রকৃতির দাস। এই কারণে বলাৎ প্রাণীদের দ্বারা কর্ম সম্পাদন করিয়ে থাকে। এরূপ কর্মে কর্তৃত্বের অভিমান কিসে ? তৃতীয় সোপান - সকল কর্মের নিষ্পাদন সমর্পণ ভাবনা দ্বারা করা উচিত। মহর্ষি কৃষ্ণঃদ্বৈপায়ন বলেছেন -জীব সকল যাহা কিছু করে থাকে, যেমন- ভোজন করা, আছতি প্রদান, দান, তপস্যা করা প্রভৃতি কর্মকে ভগবৎ অর্পণ করা। পরিণামস্বরূপ কর্মবন্ধনে শুভাশুভ ফল হইতে মুক্ত হয়ে যাবে। এই ভাবে কর্মযোগের নিষ্পত্তি হয়ে থাকে। গীতায় বলা হয়েছে -

যৎ করোষি যদশ্লাসি যদজুহোষি দদাসি যৎ।

যৎ তপস্যসি কৌন্তেয় তৎকুরুষ মদর্পণম্ ॥ ৯/২৭

বিশ্লেষণ:

অজ্ঞ ব্যক্তিগণ আসক্তি দ্বারা কর্মের আচরণ করে থাকে। কিন্তু জ্ঞানী বা বিজ্ঞ ব্যক্তিগণ আসক্তিরহিত হয়ে কর্মে প্রবৃত্ত হয়ে থাকে। এখানে হেতু কেবলমাত্র লোকসংগ্রহ। অভিপ্রায় হলো- লোককর্ম যথাবৎ রূপে নির্বাহ করা। এখানেই অজ্ঞ ও বিজ্ঞের মধ্যে পার্থক্য দৃষ্টিগোচর হয়। গীতায় বলা হয়েছে

সজ্জাঃ কর্মণি বিদ্বাংসো যথা কুবন্তি ভারত।

কুর্যাদ্ বিদ্বাংস্তথাসজ্জশ্চিকীর্ষুঃ লোকসংগ্রহম্ ॥ ৩/২৫

এখানেই প্রমাণিত হয় যে কর্মকে কর্ম ভাবনায় করা। প্রত্যেক ব্যক্তি তার নাগরিক দায়িত্ব কখনোই এড়িয়ে যেতে পারেনা। এবিষয়ে আধুনিক কালের পাশ্চাত্য দার্শনিক ইমানুয়েল KANT বলেছেন যে - Duty for Duty sake অর্থাৎ কর্তব্য কর্তব্যের জন্য- ইহা প্রমাণিত হয়। এর ভাবনা লোকসংগ্রহ থেকেই নির্গত হয়। নিষ্কাম কর্মভাব যদিও কর্ম ও ফল এই চারটি বিষয়ের ওপর আলোকপাত করেছেন। যাহা নিম্ন প্রকার -

১- আলস্য বা প্রমাদবশতঃ ফলের আকাঙ্ক্ষা না করে তদহেতু কর্ম করে যাওয়া - ইহা জনসম্মত মার্গ যাহা নিঃকৃষ্ট বা নিন্দনীয় বলে প্রতিপাদিত হয়েছে।

২- ফলের আকাঙ্ক্ষায় তদ উচিত কর্মের সম্পাদন করা -ইহা সকাম কর্মমার্গ - যাহা কর্ম - বন্ধন উৎপন্ন করে থাকে।

৩- অনাবশ্যকতার কারণেও ফলের আশা না করে কর্ম সম্পাদন না করা - ইহা নিষ্কাম কর্মমার্গ হলেও এই মর্মে লোকে জীবনযাত্রা নির্বৎ করা যথাযথ সম্ভব নহে।

৪- ফলের আকাঙ্ক্ষা না করেও কর্ম সম্পাদন করা - ইহা শ্রীমদ্ভগবৎ গীতা অনুসারে কর্মযোগ নামে খ্যাত। ইহা দ্বিতীয় ও তৃতীয় মার্গের সমন্বয়।

কর্মযোগের এই রহস্য অজ্ঞ ব্যক্তির পক্ষে সহজে বোধগম্য হওয়া অত্যন্ত কঠিন। এই কারণে সকলেই লোকসংগ্রহে ব্রতী হয়না। আধিভৌতিক আধিদৈবিক পশ্চাতে নামমাত্র আধ্যাত্মিক কর্মে লিপ্ত হয়ে জীবিকা নির্বাহপূর্বক কর্ম সম্পাদন করে থাকে। যদিও লোকব্যবহারে ইহা প্রয়োজন, কিন্তু চরম আধ্যাত্মিকতা নহে। একমাত্র লোকসংগ্রহের দ্বারা অগ্রসর হয়ে চরম আধ্যাত্মিকতা বা মুক্তি প্রাপ্ত করা সম্ভব, অন্যথা নহে। উদ্দেশ্যবিহীন জীবন-যাত্রা বা কর্ম সম্পাদন পশুসম।

আচার্য ভর্তৃহরি কৃত নীতিশতকে বলেছেন -

আহার নিদ্রাভয় মৈথুনং চ সামান্যমেতদ্ পশুভিঃ নরাণাম্ ।

ভারতীয় ঋষি-মহর্ষিগণ , বেদ, উপনিষদ, দর্শন, মহাভাষ্য প্রভৃতি গ্রন্থে সৃষ্টির আদিকাল থেকেই গান করে এসেছেন। মহাভারতের ঋষি বলেছেন-

এতদ্ উদ্দেশ্য প্রসূতস্য সকাশাদ্ অগ্রজন্মনঃ।

স্বম্ স্বম্ চরিত্রং শিক্ষেরণ পৃথিব্যা সর্বমানবাঃ ॥ মহাভারত ২/২০

ভারতীয় ষড়দর্শন - ন্যায়- বৈশেষিক, সাংখ্য- যোগ, মীমাংসা- বেদান্ত ইত্যাদি দর্শনের প্রণয়ন লোকসংগ্রহের প্রণালীর কারণেই হয়েছে। আগম গ্রন্থে বলা হয়েছে -

শাসনাং শংসনাং শাস্ত্রং শাস্ত্রমিত্যভিধীয়তে।

শাসনং দ্বিবিধং প্রোক্তং শাস্ত্রলক্ষণবেদিভিঃ।

শংসনং ভূতবস্তুর বিষয়ং ন ক্রিয়াপরম্ ॥

অর্থাৎ শাস্ত্র শব্দের ব্যুৎপত্তি দুটি ধাতু দ্বারা হয়েছে। যথা- শাস এবং শংস। অর্থ হলো আদেশ তথা বর্ণনা করা। সুতরাং প্রাচীন শাস্ত্রের ব্যাখ্যা যথাযথ অধ্যয়নপূর্বক আচরণ দ্বারা নাগরিক দায়িত্ব পালনও যেমন একদিকে সম্ভব, অন্যদিকে লোকসংগ্রহের উদ্দেশ্যে মুক্তিগামী হওয়ার জন্য উত্তর মীমাংসা বা বেদান্ত দর্শন ব্রহ্ম বিদ্যার চরম আধ্যাত্মিকতাকে প্রতিপাদিত করেছেন। মুণ্ডক উপনিষদে বলা হয়েছে -

স ব্রহ্মবিদ্যাং সর্ববিদ্যাপ্রতিষ্ঠামথর্বায় জৈষ্ঠপুত্রায় প্রাহ্ । মুণ্ডক উপনিষদ্ ১/১

এই বসয়টিকে গীতাকার মহর্ষি কৃষ্ণ দ্বৈপায়ন উদ্ধৃত করে বলেছেন -

অধ্যাত্মবিদ্যা বিদ্যানাং বাদঃ প্রবদতামহম্। - 10/32

উপসংহার:

লোকসংগ্রহ রূপী কর্ম রহস্যের আলোচনায় ভারতীয় দর্শনের তাত্ত্বিক, নৈতিক, ব্যবহারিক এবং আধ্যাত্মিক বিষয়গুলি একে -অপরের সঙ্গে এমনভাবে জড়িত যে একটি তত্ত্বকে বাদ দিলে মুক্তি বা নিঃশেষ প্রাপ্তকরা অসম্ভব। উদাহরণস্বরূপ বলা যায় যে প্রথমে বস্তু পরীক্ষণ - নির্ণয় - সংখ্যা-তত্ত্বজ্ঞান- কর্মনির্ধারণ- সম্পাদন- চরিত্রে ধারণপূর্বক জ্ঞান আরোহণ করে মুক্তি লাভ করা। এখানে বর্ণধর্ম পালন, আশ্রম ধর্মের কর্তব্য -পালন, পুরুষার্থ চতুষ্টয়-এর জ্ঞান, অনুবন্ধ চতুষ্টয়ের জ্ঞান শ্রবণ- মনন - নিদিধ্যাসন পশ্চাতে আত্ম - সাক্ষাৎকার এবং মুক্তি ক্রমশঃ শৃঙ্খলা বদ্ধ হিসেবে রয়েছে। অর্থাৎ মানব জীবনের লক্ষ্য নির্ধারণে ব্যবহারপক্ষ ও আধ্যাত্মিকপক্ষ সমানরূপে পালনীয়। বৃহদারণ্যক উপনিষদে বলা হয়েছে-

1-আত্মা বা অরে দ্রষ্টব্যঃ শ্রোতব্যঃ মন্তব্যঃ নিদিধ্যাসিতব্যঃ।

আত্মনো বা অরে দর্শনেন, শ্রবণেন, মত্যা বিজ্ঞানেনেনদং সর্বং বিজ্ঞাতং ভবতি।। বৃহদারণ্যক উপনিষদ্ ২/৪/৮

2- শ্রোতব্যঃ শ্রুতিবাক্যোভ্য মন্তব্যঃ উপপত্তিভিঃ।

মত্বা তু সততং ধ্যেয় এতে দর্শনহেতাঃ .

3- ধর্ম জিজ্ঞাসমানানাম প্রমাণম পরমম শ্রুতিঃ।

রাষ্ট্রীয় ভাবনায় মানব বা নাগরিক ভিন্ন-ভিন্ন কর্মে লিপ্ত থাকে, যেমন - ব্যবহারে, জ্ঞানে, ধ্যানে তথা ভক্তিতে। এখানে অভিপ্রায় হলো যে প্রত্যেক মানবের পক্ষে ব্যবহার যেমন অপরিহার্য, তেমনি জ্ঞান-ধ্যান- ভক্তিও আধ্যাত্মিক চরমোৎকর্ষের জন্য অনিবার্য। এতদ ব্যতিরেকে মুক্তি সম্ভব নহে। ঋগ্বেদে বলা হয়েছে - ঋতে জ্ঞানান্ন মুক্তিঃ। সুতরাং প্রকৌশলী হোক বা চিকিৎসক হোক, রাজনেতা হোক বা সাধারণ মানুষ সকলের জন্য সামাজিক বিজ্ঞানের অধ্যয়ন অনিবার্য হওয়া উচিত। এতদ ব্যতিরেকে সমাজ , সংস্কৃতি, সাহিত্য ও সনাতন থেকে সম্পূর্ণভাবে বিমুখ এক প্রজন্ম তৈরী হতে থাকবে, যাহা সচরাচর দৃষ্টিগোচর হয়। অতএব কর্মের মাধ্যমে লোকসংগ্রহের রহস্য জেনে পরমগতি প্রাপ্ত করা মানব জীবনের একমাত্র লক্ষ্য হওয়া উচিত ,ইহাই সনাতন স্বীকৃতি।

সন্দর্ভ গ্রন্থসূচী -

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Book Review

***Indian Graphic Narratives: Critical Responses* edited by Sapna Dogra**

Reviewed by

Meghna Borate Mane

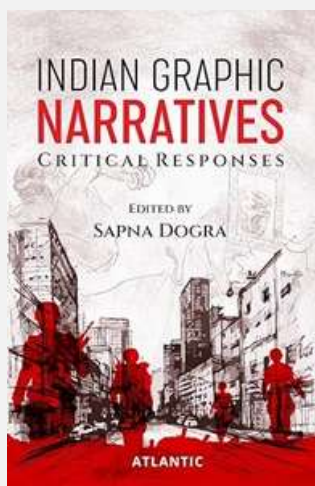
Ph.D. Scholar

Department of English

Mumbai University

Mumbai, India.

Email: megsb1592@gmail.com



Book: *Indian Graphic Narratives: Critical Responses*

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Email: confluence.sjgc@gmail.com

Indian Graphic Narratives: Critical Responses (2024) is a compilation of essays offering varied critical perspectives on some of the acclaimed Indian graphic narratives. These essays examine key works such as Amruta Patil's *Kari*, Sarnath Banerjee's *Corridor*, Pratik Thomas and Rajiv Eipe's *Hush*, Malik Sajad's *Munnu: A Boy From Kashmir*, Naseer Ahmed and Saurabh Singh's *Kashmir Pending* and other Indian graphic narratives, addressing concepts of gender, identity, social discrimination, sociopolitical paradigms, and socio-spatial expression. Some of the essays also advocate for the unique narrative power of graphic discourse as a medium and a tool for social change, particularly when integrated into educational curricula.

This collection positions Indian graphic narratives within the “global graphic turn” (xvi), emphasising their relevance in representing themes as broad as destruction, desolation, abuse, deprivation, displacement, and trauma. The book's contributors, including the editor—all emerging and established scholars in the field—delve into narrative strategies that set Indian graphic novels apart from the American, European, and Manga traditions. In India, as the editor notes, graphic narratives are evolving into “a new representational mode” that has seamlessly integrated into the canon of Indian Writing in English (IWE) (xi). The essays emphasise the significance of this graphic turn, highlighting how the increasing adoption of this medium by authors and artists is shaping a unique and powerful visual language that is part of a gradual “subversive literary [and artistic] movement” in the country. (Nayak, 15)

The introduction to the book draws on the history of graphic narratives in India and on how this medium has shaped the collective historical and social imaginaries. It provides a well-researched overview of how Indian graphic storytelling has evolved, touching upon key moments in its development and linking it to broader socio-political discourses. The introduction also effectively synthesises existing scholarship on the subject, situating this collection within ongoing critical debates. From representing the exploration of sexuality, sexual abuse and gender identity (*Kari*, *Hush* and *Drawing the Line: Indian Women Fight Back*), historical post-memories of the public historical mass-events like the Indian Emergency of 1975-77, the Partition, political turmoil in Kashmir (*Delhi Calm*, *This Side That Side: Restorying Partition*, *Munnu: A Boy from Kashmir* and *Kashmir Pending*), social discrimination (*A Gardener in the Wasteland: Jyotiba Phule's Fight for Liberty* and *Bhimayana: The Experiences of Untouchability*), environmental degradation in Orjit Sen's *River of Stories* and *All Quiet in Vikaspuri* and even mythological reworking (*Adi Parva: Churning of the Ocean*, *Sauptik: Blood and Flowers* and *Aranyaka: Book of the Forest*). The book, therefore, establishes itself as a valuable contribution to the study of Indian graphic narratives, bringing together essays that analyse their thematic, visual, and narrative complexities.

The book devotes significant attention to Amruta Patil's *Kari*, analysing it through multiple critical lenses. The opening chapter, "The Graphic Deterritorialisation: A Socio-Analytic Study of Amruta Patil's *Kari*", offers a socio-analytic reading of *Kari*, examining identity crises, estrangement, and queer representation. The discussion draws on Deleuzian ideas of deterritorialisation while considering *Kari*'s engagement with Indian cultural contexts. The second chapter, "Gender and Violence in Indian Graphic Narratives", takes a comparative approach to several graphic narratives written by female graphic novelists and artists, featuring women protagonists. This provides a distinctive examination of the evolving portrayal of gender and sexuality in the Indian context. "Cityscapes and Real-Imagined Spatiality: Locating Topophrenia" offers a spatial reading of *Kari*, particularly in relation to evolving urban landscapes. This chapter examines the interplay between visual storytelling and the lived realities of urban existence, highlighting how space shapes identity and narrative structure. Meanwhile, "Marginalised Non-Heterosexual in Normalised Heterosexual Metropolitan City" revisits the novel through the lens of gender performativity and non-binary identity, emphasising its navigation of queerness within a heteronormative society. Together, these chapters provide a multifaceted exploration of gender-centred graphic narratives, including *Kari*, reflecting its complexity and enduring relevance.

The third chapter, "The Impact of Social Paradigms and its Resonance on the Characters of Sarnath Banerjee's *Corridor*", examines how the graphic narrative engages with societal expectations and individuality. The analysis explores the narrative's engagement with urban life, personal freedom, and cultural shifts within contemporary India by portraying a city in flux, where tradition and modernity collide, shaping the identities of its inhabitants. Through its characters, the narrative records the existential struggles of urban youth, providing a layered critique of Indian social structures.

The study of the graphic narrative *Hush* in the fifth chapter offers a poignant exploration of trauma through a wordless narrative, relying solely on visual storytelling to convey the harrowing experience of abuse. The absence of text forces the reader to engage more deeply with the imagery, mirroring the silences that often accompany trauma. This use of the graphic form to depict psychological distress is part of a broader trend where graphic narratives have become an increasingly popular medium for representing trauma. The interplay of text and image allows for a more fragmented, yet deeply affective, portrayal of traumatic memory, capturing its non-linear and often unspeakable nature. Many works, such as *Maus*, *Persepolis*, and others, exemplify how graphic storytelling can articulate experiences of abuse, violence, displacement, and marginalisation in ways that traditional prose struggles to achieve. In this context, *Hush* aligns

with a growing global body of graphic narratives that use visual metaphors, panel transitions, and narrative gaps to reflect the silences and ruptures inherent in trauma, making the medium a compelling space for personal and collective histories of suffering and resilience.

The chapters, “Animals as Visual Metaphors in Graphic Narratives” in *Munnu: A Boy from Kashmir* and “Violence and Manipulation in Kashmir Pending,” explore themes of geopolitical violence and identity. The discussion of animal metaphors in *Munnu* considers how animal symbolism functions within narratives of historical trauma and resistance, drawing on semiotic representations of anthropomorphism. Similarly, *Kashmir Pending* is examined as a counter-narrative to state discourse, highlighting its portrayal of conflict and resistance within the Kashmir region. The juxtaposition of these texts within the collection situates Indian graphic narratives within a broader tradition of political storytelling, akin to *Maus* and other global works that use the medium to challenge dominant historical narratives.

“Graphic Narratives as an Educational Tool” and “Graphic Narratives: An Emerging Source of Education for Learners” collectively explore the pedagogical significance of graphic narratives in contemporary learning environments. They highlight the unique ability of visual storytelling to engage students, enhance literacy, and stimulate critical thinking. These discussions underline the potential of graphic novels to bridge textual and visual comprehension, offering an interdisciplinary approach to education. The inclusion of theoretical perspectives on multimodal learning reinforces the argument. It also establishes a scope for additional empirical studies revolving around visual learning models within the Indian educational framework.

Given the growing prominence of graphic narratives, there is a clear opportunity for a future edition of the book to incorporate new voices and perspectives, expanding on additional works that have emerged in the field. In fact, one of the book’s most innovative aspects is its implicit encouragement for future researchers to explore underrepresented themes and works, positioning this collection as a foundation rather than a definitive anthology. The exclusion of some contemporary Indian graphic works in this volume reflects the field’s dynamic and ever-evolving nature, signalling the need for ongoing exploration. Thus, this edition serves as a critical, although initial, map of Indian graphic narratives.

Indian Graphic Narratives: Critical Responses, therefore, underscores the distinctiveness of homegrown graphic storytelling by examining its culturally-rooted narrative techniques. The book is an excellent example of how Indian graphic narratives employ indigenous visual metaphors, fragmented storytelling, intertextual references to mythology, folklore, and popular culture, and multilingual text to construct narratives deeply tied to local histories and sociopolitical realities. By engaging with these elements, the essays in this volume reinforce the

Indianness of the medium, demonstrating how it moves beyond Western influences to carve its own space in the global discourse of comics and graphic narratives. This focus on cultural specificity makes the book a valuable contribution to understanding how graphic novels in India function as both artistic expressions and socio-political commentaries, reflecting the complexities of identity, resistance, and memory in the Indian context.

In conclusion, all the essays in this volume align with ongoing debates on the Indian graphic narrative as a medium for exploring identity and cultural specificity. It interrogates *Indianness* not as a fixed construct but as an evolving narrative shaped by historical, political, and social forces. By examining how these graphic texts engage with local storytelling traditions while conversing with global influences, the book highlights their ability to assert regional identity and address universal concerns simultaneously. Moreover, the chapters on graphic narratives as an educational tool critically assess the medium's potential and constraints, reinforcing its intellectual and pedagogical value. While there is scope for a new anthology to include the ever-expanding collection of graphic books in India, the book remains an essential reference for courses on graphic narratives, offering a springboard for deeper interdisciplinary studies and signalling new avenues for scholarship in this vibrant field.



Book Review

Silent Screams and the Plight of the Marginalised: A Review of Dipak Giri's *Subaltern Perspectives in Indian Context*

Reviewed by

Aisha Haleem

Assistant Professor of English

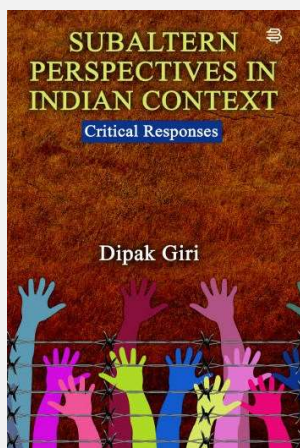
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

Shri Ramswaroop Memorial University

Lucknow-Deva Road, Barabanki

Uttar Pradesh, India.

Email: aishahaleem141096@gmail.com



*Subaltern Perspectives in Indian Context: Critical
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Email: confluence.sjgc@gmail.com

“Let literature teach us that there are no certainties, that the process is open, and that it may be altogether salutary that it is so.”

— Gayatri Chakroborty Spivak in *Death of the Disciple*

True to Spivak’s opinion as quoted above, Dipak Giri’s *Subaltern Perspectives in Indian Context: Critical Responses* seeks inclusivity by drawing all the marginalised groups of people in India. The book gives space to Dalits, Tribes, women, workers, peasants, labourers, and people of many other voiceless communities. The book comprises twenty-three chapters written by scholars and academics from various parts of India and, most importantly, includes an interview conducted by the editor with the Saraswati Samman awardee, popular Dalit writer Sharankumar Limbale. The organization of the chapters is elaborate and methodical, revealing both thematic coherence and diversity in methodological approaches, thereby allowing readers to engage with subalternity from a multiplicity of critical perspectives.

The first chapter, “Arupa Patangia Kalita’s *Felanee*: The Tenacity of the Voiceless,” by Anmona Bora, foregrounds ethnic violence in Assam and offers a meticulous analysis of the novel *Felanee*. Bora examines the life of Felanee, a woman doubly colonized by socio-political structures and patriarchal norms, and presents a historiographical critique that situates the novel within real-life socio-political events. The analysis highlights the interplay between literature and history, demonstrating how fiction can serve as a lens for understanding marginalized experiences and historiography.

Following this, Aswathy Mohan’s chapter, “Epiphany at the Heart of Silence: Amitav Ghosh’s Rediscovery of the Subaltern Voice,” engages critically with four of Amitav Ghosh’s novels, *The Glass Palace*, *The Hungry Tide*, *The Circle of Reason*, and *Sea of Poppies*, to explore the dynamics of marginalization. Mohan’s research identifies a recurring narrative pattern wherein protagonists attempt to move from the margins to the centre of societal recognition but are often relegated back to the peripheries due to structural and identity-based constraints. The chapter insightfully asserts, “In addressing the challenges the subaltern face in recovering and representing themselves in stories, Ghosh tries to coalesce the encumbrances and the issues that gag them” (Giri 25), thereby highlighting the structural challenges faced by subaltern characters and, by extension, real-life marginalized groups.

Dr. Nitasha Baloria’s contribution emphasizes the subtle forms of subalternity that persist even within ostensibly privileged settings. Her chapter on Shashi Deshpande’s *That Long Silence* examines the societal mechanisms that condition women’s behaviour, compelling them to adopt silence as a strategic survival response. Baloria demonstrates how literature can render visible the nuances of oppression, particularly the internalized subalternity imposed upon women through societal norms and familial expectations. Complementing this, Dr. Sanobar Kahkeshan’s “Depiction of Subaltern Theme in Rohinton Mistry’s *A Fine Balance*” and Anamitra Chatterjee’s “Perspectives on Marginalisation in Literature and Cinema in Reference to Mulk Raj Anand’s Select Novels and Ashutosh Gawarikar’s Film *Lagaan*” further explore literary and cinematic representations of marginalization, underscoring the interplay between socio-political structures and creative narratives.

Several chapters in this volume expand the study of subalternity to diverse literary and cinematic texts. Saptarshi Sengupta and Dr. Mohammad Nazrul Bari’s “Marginalised Fragments

of Colonial Bengal through Subaltern Perspectives” investigates subaltern experiences during colonial Bengal. In contrast, Tania Baloria’s “Vocalising Marginalised: A Perspective from Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things*” examines not only the positionality of marginalized individuals in Ayemenem but also their capacity for vocalisation within a semi-autobiographical framework. Baloria’s analysis illuminates the ways in which Roy negotiates personal and collective histories, highlighting the intersection of lived experience and narrative agency.

The anthology also emphasizes cinema as a medium for subaltern representation. Harish Mangalam’s “Dalit Films and Commitment” traces the trajectory of Dalit cinema, particularly in Maharashtra, demonstrating how filmmakers and writers have historically foregrounded the concerns of marginalized communities. Mangalam’s analysis includes the Gujarati film *Tame Keva*, interpreting the symbolic resonance of character names such as Ramji, which evokes Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, a seminal figure in Dalit emancipation. He notes, “In this film, the protagonist Ramji fights against urban casteism with full commitment” (Giri 96), illustrating the power of cinematic narrative in engaging with issues of caste-based oppression.

Similarly, Dr. Debarati Nandy’s “Prospect of Tribal Art Market in India: A Brief Scenario” examines subalternity through the lens of market structures, employing a Marxist perspective to interrogate the intersections of caste, class, and economic exploitation. By analyzing the commercialisation of tribal art, Nandy demonstrates how systemic subjugation operates through material and economic mechanisms, providing a nuanced understanding of marginalization beyond textual representation. Dr. Andrey Shastri and Raghavendra Garai offer complementary examinations of Dalit subalternity, focusing on the socio-political and literary representation of marginalized communities. Garai, in particular, observes, “The approach of their writings is the gush of inspiration that helps to understand the history of untouchables, ... To present themselves properly in this society, their writings reveal a clear consciousness of Dalits or Untouchables’ struggle with metaphorical contiguity” (Giri 154-55), thereby highlighting the literary articulation of subaltern consciousness.

The anthology further addresses themes of germination and historiography in the subaltern discourse. Priya Ghosh’s “Sad State of Subaltern: The Root Cause for Its Germination” and Saleha Ilhaam’s “Revisiting, Reflecting and Relocating the Subaltern and Subaltern Historiography” interrogate the origins, persistence, and reinterpretation of subaltern positions, emphasizing the relevance of historical consciousness in understanding contemporary marginalization. Injela Zaini’s “The Subaltern Can Speak: Manto as the ‘Crusader’ of the Marginalised Women” provides a compelling case study of literary subalternity, highlighting Manto’s engagement with women in prostitution — a group systematically excluded from social recognition. Zaini asserts, “The rebellious, intelligent and genuine women characters of Manto manage to create quite a ruckus in the subaltern space by breaking all known stereotypes and pre-conceived notion” (Giri 179), underscoring the transformative potential of literature in challenging entrenched social hierarchies.

The volume extends its focus to the subalternity of other marginalized communities. Nitish Gogoi’s “Migrant Coolies in Assam’s Tea Gardens: Migration History, Colonial Exploitation, Control of Labour and the Making of Coolie Line in Assam” explores the historical and structural conditions affecting labourers in Assam’s tea gardens. Similarly, Arindam Mukherjee’s “Barriers to the Spread of Education among Muslim Women” examines the intersection of religious practice and gendered subalternity, highlighting the socio-cultural

impediments to education. Kishalaya Podder's "Position of Women in Colonial Bengal: A Discussion of Short Stories of Rabindranath Tagore from Subaltern Perspectives" and Sagar Rakshit's chapter on Mahasweta Devi's *Draupadi* critically interrogate women's subalternity through literary texts, emphasizing the enduring effects of double colonization and structural marginalization. SK Saiful Rehaman's "A Study of Female Subaltern in Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable*" further foregrounds women's lived experiences, blending textual analysis with socio-historical context to illuminate the nuanced realities of subaltern existence.

The anthology also addresses subalternity in agrarian communities. Sindhura Dutta's "Can Peasants Speak?: The Bengal Famine in 1943 and its Depiction through Illustrations by Chittaprosad Bhattacharya" creatively engages with Spivak's seminal question, analyzing the lived experiences of peasants during colonial rule and their exclusion from structures of power (Giri 242). Biplob Ghosh's "Diversity of Farmers Movement in India and a New Light" situates these communities within the broader trajectory of agrarian activism, examining movements during the 1970s and post-Green Revolution era. Ghosh's quantitative analysis demonstrates how systemic economic pressures — such as price fluctuations and indebtedness — have contributed to the persistent marginalization of farmers, concluding, "In many cases they are suffering due to price increases and the decline in prices of the produce crops and they are falling at the council of loans they have taken and are opting for suicide. Still, no peasant movement took place in an organized manner against these injustices" (Giri 284).

Finally, Dr. Dipak Giri concludes the volume with an incisive interview with Dalit writer Sharankumar Limbale, examining the broader implications of Dalit subalternity and situating Limbale's literary oeuvre within the subaltern framework. This concluding chapter reinforces the significance of dialogue and intellectual engagement in understanding the complexities of marginalized identities.

In conclusion, *Subaltern Perspectives in Indian Context: Critical Responses* is a comprehensive and meticulously curated anthology that interrogates the dynamics of marginalization across multiple axes, including caste, gender, class, ethnicity, and profession. By incorporating fiction, non-fiction, cinema, and art, the volume illuminates the multidimensionality of subalternity and underscores its dynamic, non-static nature. Each chapter contributes a distinct analytical perspective, collectively offering a profound engagement with subaltern theory and praxis. Giri's editorial vision, culminating in his dialogue with Sharankumar Limbale, affirms the contemporary relevance of subaltern discourse in India and beyond, while simultaneously demonstrating literature's capacity to unsettle certainties and amplify marginalized voices. This anthology is an indispensable resource for scholars, students, and readers invested in literary studies, cultural analysis, and social justice, providing a comprehensive framework for the ongoing exploration of subaltern identities.



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Seth Soorajmull Jalan Girls' College

8/9, Bankim Chatterjee Street, College Square, Kolkata-700073,
West Bengal, India.

Email: ssjalancollege@gmail.com

Website: <https://ssjalangirlscollege.org.in/>

